PRECARIOUS PRINTERS:

Labour, technology & material culture at the NSW Government Printing Office 1959–1989

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PhD Design
2014
University of Technology Sydney

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who laboured at the NSW Government Printing Office, 1840–1989.

Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the dissertation has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research and the preparation of the dissertation itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the dissertation.

Dissertation word length: 88,444 words.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to my primary supervisor, Professor Peter McNeil, whose wisdom and sage advice was invaluable, and who retained a relaxed and cheerful faith in my ability to produce this work, even when I was not so sure myself. Special thanks also go to my secondary supervisor, Dr Susan Stewart, particularly for her detailed feedback and her rigorous and critical but always warm and supportive approach.

This project would not have been possible without the time and energy generously given by the oral history participants in this project, former employees of the NSW Government Printing Office. It is these employees' stories and thoughtful reflections that have given this research project a life of its own, and it is my hope that I can do justice to some of their experiences as workers. A list of the oral history interviews appears in the following section.

Many former employees of the Government Printing Office assisted in this project; only some of these people were formally interviewed. The following people generously provided their time, photographs, ephemera, archival materials, objects, recollections and encouragement:
Bob Bartrim, Bill Brooks, George Bryant, Jackie Cliffe, Tony Cliffe, Kim Cooper, Peter Crozier, John Cusack, Frank Druery, Ken Duffey, Barry Elborn, Renato Gravagna, Victor Gunther, Tim Guy, Terry Hagenhofer, Alan Hagerty, Bob Hart, Geoff Hawes, Ray Hopkins, Alan Howes, Philip James, Rudi Kolbach, George Larden, Bob Law, John Lee, Alan Leishman, Neil Lewis, Glenn MacKellar, Granville May, Phillip Morehouse, Win Morehouse, Graeme Murray, Stephen Noyes, Pamela Pearce, Noel Quinn, Warwick Richardson, Norm Rigney, Phillip Rhoden, Michael Rubacki, Barry Skewes, Lindsay Somerville, Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, Robert Swan, Stella Tekstra, Allan Townsend, Ray Utick and Don West.

Throughout the research process several interview participants went above and beyond in their helpfulness, showing great care and attention as the project progressed. Particular gratitude goes to former letterpress printer Ray Utick, who regularly provided photographs, film, sound recordings, ephemera and pieces of type. Ray also assisted me in arranging a visit to the Penrith Museum of Printing with other former letterpress printers, and in arranging an interview with former letterpress printer George Larden. George was 102 years old when I interviewed him in March 2013. He passed away in mid-2014.

Grateful thanks extend to the following academics, historians and experts who provided scholarly advice and encouragement between 2011 and 2014: Professor Paul Ashton, Professor Paul Atkinson, Dr Dennis Bryans, Professor Paul Carter, Professor Raewyn Connell, Matthew Connell, Dr Shirley Fitzgerald, Dr Michael Golec, Gideon Haigh, Dr Daniel J. Huppatz, Dr Simon Jackson, Dr Jacqueline Lorber-Kasunic, Humphrey McQueen, Dr Lizzie Muller, Richard Peck, Dr Rosslyn Reed, Chris Ronalds SC, Dr Emma Rowden, Dr Zoe Sadokierski, Assoc. Professor Toni Schofield, Professor David Silverman, Dr Ann Stephen and Professor Judy Wajcman.

The following people provided recollections of the period and knowledge about government printing and union politics: former Commonwealth Government Printer John Thompson, former Government Printer of South Australia Don Woolman, Government Printer of Western Australia John Strijk, former National Secretary of the Printing and Kindred Industries Union John Cahill, former NSW Secretary of the Printing and Kindred Industries Union Gordon Cook and Allan Wetherell of Sydney Institute TAFE.

Special acknowledgement goes to Hazel Baker for her keen editorial eye, and to Evelyn Kwok, David Henley and Erin Turner for their assistance with design. I was also given extensive support in terms of accessing resources and research advice from the following people: Ann Hobson, Terry Royce, Jenna Price, Jemima McDonald of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS); Erika Dicker of the Powerhouse Museum; Margy Burn, Kevin Bradley, Sue Chan and Ingrid Finnane of the National Library of Australia; Clancy Walker and Bev Brooks of the Sydney Historical Society; Sian Nicholls of Information Services, NSW Department of Finance and Services; Mark O'Brien of Global Switch Sydney; Zoe Pollock, formerly of the NSW History Council and Joe Kowalewski of PrintNet. Thanks also to Bob Meade, Russell Walker, Phil and Liz Martini, Jeff Miles, Brian Freeman, Grant Hofmeyer, Colleen Crockett and Grant South.

The institutions and organisations that assisted with this research are: the UTS Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building; the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW); UTS Library; UTS Human Research Ethics Committee; NSW State Records; City of Sydney Archives; NSW Department of Finance & Services; the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the NSW History Council, the Penrith Museum of Printing, the Oral History Association of NSW and Oral History Australia.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the unconditional love, support and close reading provided by my parents, Barbara Adams and Paul Stein. My partner, Eugene Schofield-Georgeson, possessed an enthusiasm and interest in this topic that allowed me the luxury of having challenging discussions about the politics of labour and design whenever I pleased, and for that I am eternally grateful. I am also appreciative of the encouragement and support given by my friends: Barnaby Bennett, Kylie Benton-Connell, Courtney Booth, Dan Cass, Amy Corderoy, Nicole Gardner, Dr Rebecca Giggs, Alice Grundy, Jennifer Hagedorn, Evelyn Kwok, Dr Astrid Lorange, Jacob Saulwick, Dr Anthony Springford, Michael Slezak, Dr Kevin Alexander Su, Kitty Ray, Liam Ryan, César Albarrán Torres and Marni Williams.

Record of Oral History Interviews

Thirty-one people were formally interviewed for this oral history research project (25 men and six women). Some oral history participants requested that their identities remain confidential, while most consented to their names being made public. Those who sought the option of confidentiality have been given pseudonyms and some details about their position and duration of service have been withheld so as to de-identify them. In the rare case where the inclusion of details about an employee's gender and apprenticed trade may risk compromising their anonymity, the participant has specifically approved all selected quotes prior to publication. I extend grateful thanks to the following interview participants:

Name	Position and/or trade	Years of service	Date of interview
George Bryant	Despatch Offsider	1959–1961	28 September 2012
Kim Cooper	Bookbinder/Planner	1977–1989	29 November 2011
Colleen Crockett	Compositor (not at the Govt Printing Office)	n/a	8 December 2011
Ken Duffey	Press-machinist (lithography)	1958–1962	11 February 2012
Victor Gunther	Press-machinist (letterpress)	1946–1952	15 August 2012
Tim Guy	Compositor and Computer Specialist	1972–1989	24 July 2013
Terry Hagenhofer	Apprentice Compositor/Camera Operator/ Supervisor	1973–1989	5 December 2011
Geoff Hawes	Compositor/Supervisor	1967–1989	16 February 2012
Rudi Kolbach	Compositor (& sales rep)	1957–1963	12 December 2011
Bob Law	Linotype Operator/Supervisor	1968–1989	27 February 2012
George Larden	Press-machinist (Letterpress)	1932–1971	14 March 2013
Alan Leishman	Supervisor Photographic Reproduction/ Manager Planning and Liaison	1955–1989	28 October 2011
Neil Lewis	Compositor/Monotype Operator	1977–1989	17 January 2012
John Lee	Compositor/Document Reproduction	1962–1989	2 August 2012
Anna Lyons*	Press-machinist (letterpress & lithography)	1970s – 1980s	28 February 2012
Glenn MacKellar	Press-machinist (letterpress & lithography)	1973–1989	1 December 2011
Granville May	Press-machinist/Manager	1976–1989	8 February 2012
Phillip Morehouse	Reader's Assistant	1963–1989	21 October 2011
Win Morehouse	Reader's Assistant	1963–1976/77	21 October 2011
Graeme Murray	Lithographic dot-etching & retouching	1960s	9 November 2011
Stephen Noyes	Compositor	1978–1984	20 February 2012
Pamela Pearce	Chief of Division – Marketing	1986–1988	23 January 2012
Phillip Rhoden	Paper ruler/Machinist in MSS	1963–1969	27 February 2013
Norm Rigney	Press-machinist/Planner	1964–1989	30 January 2012
Michael Rubacki	Personnel (& Parliamentary Counsel's Office)	early 1980s	17 May 2012
Barry Skewes	Compositor/Proof reader	1978–1989	17 January 2012
Lindsay Somerville	Compositor/Monotype operator	1961–1967	15 December 2011
Sandra Elizabeth Stringer	Graphic Reproduction	1984–1989	17 October 2012
Ray Utick	Press-machinist (letterpress & lithography)	1955–1989	13 November 2012
Don West	Government Printer	1973–1989	12 September 2012
George Woods*	Compositor/Designer/Planner	1960–1989	21 February 2012

* Indicates pseudonym

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Within this dissertation the NSW Government Printing Office will often be referred to as the 'Gov'. This is partly for the sake of brevity. In the twentieth century, the term the 'Gov' (sometimes spelled the 'Guv') was in wide colloquial use by employees and also by clients, as indicated by oral history testimony and Government Printing Office staff journals.

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PRECARIOUS PRINTERS:

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Abstract

From 1959 to 1989 the NSW Government Printing Office (hereafter 'the Gov') was a government-run printing establishment that operated from a centralised factory in Ultimo, Sydney. Over a 30-year period marked by dramatic technological change and political transitions, the Gov was pulled in conflicting directions by traditionalists, unionists, economic rationalists and those somewhere in between. It was also one of the first Australian factories to open printing apprenticeships to women. This combination – technological change, the rising influence of neo-liberal economics and gender-labour tensions – made for an unsettled institution. In mid-1989 the state government abruptly closed down the Gov and 700 people lost their jobs.

This thesis operates on two levels: it offers both an historical and a methodological contribution to knowledge. At an historical level *Precarious Printers* is an exploration of how the Gov's workers – from labourers to managers – coped with technological, social and political change. This has brought to light many aspects of the Gov's culture of working life (everyday practices and unofficial stories) and it indicates the important presence of objects, technologies and spaces as they exist in memories of working life.

Two central coping practices are identified: *building alliances* and *unofficial creative production*. Firstly, the Gov's employees came to grips with their circumstances by developing alliances with people and/or technologies. This involved staking out territories spatially or by developing their skills. Some workers clung to their skills, traditional tools and collective practices. Others enthusiastically embraced new technologies with an individualistic drive for self-improvement. Secondly, many of the Gov's employees enacted their own narratives – of resilience, belonging and of industrial decline – through unsanctioned creative practices. This came in the form of photographs, film, pranks and the unofficial production of printed materials (foreign orders).

The key theoretical and methodological contribution of this dissertation is a demonstration of how labour history can be effectively drawn together with considerations of material culture. As a case study, the Gov reveals how the politics of work is intertwined with the physical and designed world. This dissertation provides a method for analysing labour, technology and industrial history that retains the voices of the workers and adds a relevant consideration of spaces, objects and embodied experience. Correspondingly, this research draws upon a number of disciplines: labour history, sociology, the history of technology and studies of material culture and design. Primary source materials include oral history, photographs and archives.

Rather than simply aestheticising past technologies and industrial spaces, *Precarious Printers* finds that material culture, technology and spatial dynamics are significant elements in an analysis of working life and in developing an understanding of people's adaptive responses to technological change and workplace upheaval.

Preface

The oft-lamented 'death of print' has been heralded for some time now.[1] The publishing industry has turned its energy to online and electronic media and newspapers continue to shed printers and journalists. Government publishing under the Westminster system – once literally bound by the authoritative presence of the leather-bound printed codex[2] – is increasingly digitised and immaterial, a 'pdf' affair. As the last vestiges of paper-based print culture appeared to disintegrate into ephemeral digital data, I began to wonder about the harbingers of this major shift. My earlier research, originating in the discipline of design history, involved a focus on the introduction of new technologies into hitherto technologically un-colonised contexts. The examination of material culture and its social relations in these contexts involved an unravelling of issues related to domesticity, gender, status and personal computing.[3]

With this background, I turned my attention to the early days of the digital switch in the printing industry. It is in this industry that the tangible presence of things was a particularly fraught matter. The disruptive manifestation of new computer typesetting equipment, for example, asserted its presence not merely through workflow changes, retraining and retrenchment. The fundamental physical presence of such new technologies also dictated print-workers' futures. Linotype operators had to retrain their hands and minds, re-learning to type, this time on small qwerty keyboards. Moreover, these boxy, beige computers signalled a new order, one characterised by individualism, seemingly opaque technical systems and the end of strictly delineated and highly skilled trades and crafts.

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[1] J.A. Dewar & P.H. Ang (2007), 'The cultural consequences of printing and the internet', in S.A. Baron, E.N. Lindquist & E.F. Shelvin (eds), *Agent of change: Print culture studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein,* University of Massachusetts Press and the Centre for the Book, Library of Congress, Amherst and Boston, pp. 365–77; A. Marshall (1983), *Changing the word: The printing industry in transition*, Comedia Publishing Group, London; G. Nunberg (1996), 'Farewell to the information age', in G. Nunberg (ed.), *The future of the book*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, pp. 103–38; F. Robertson (2013), *Print culture: From steam press to ebook*, Routledge, London & New York, p. 119.

[2] O. Frankel (2006), *States of inquiry: social investigations and print culture in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp. 2, 46, 87.

[3] J. A. Stein (2009), 'Domesticity and gender in the industrial design of Apple Computer 1977–1984', Masters thesis, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; J.A. Stein (2011), 'In memoriam: Domesticity, gender and the 1977 Apple II personal computer', *Design and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 193–216.

The period from the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s saw the gradual entry of personal computers into domestic and labour contexts in developed capitalist economies. This transformation has been well documented in sociology and social histories of technology.[4] The introduction of computerised and automated technologies profoundly transformed the labour conditions and industrial politics in factory and office workplaces. In some cases, automation and computerisation made tasks less dangerous or physically taxing, but in others, the introduction of new technologies made employees' hard-won trade skills redundant. Computerisation often reduced the number of employees required and in many cases it further degraded the workers' connection to the production process.[5]

As sociological and labour history studies have established, printing was an exceptional case; well into the twentieth century it remained a stalwart 'craft' compared to other more automated manufacturing industries.[6] The labour supply of apprenticed tradespersons was tightly controlled by unions and printers were able to maintain long-standing technical practices (such as letterpress and hot-metal typesetting) by restricting the access to printing machinery through trade demarcation and limiting union membership in skilled printing trades.[7] By the second-

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[4] See for example: J. Agar (2003), *The government machine: A revolutionary history of the computer*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London; P. Atkinson (2010), *Computer*, Reaktion Books, New York; D. Butler (1988), 'Secretarial skills and office technology', in E. Willis (ed.), *Technology and the labour process: Australasian case studies*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 20–32; E.N. Glenn & R.L. Feldberg (1979), 'Proletarianizing clerical work: Technology and organizational control in the office', in *Case studies on the labor process*, pp. 51–72; S. Liff (1993), 'Information technology and occupational restructuring in the office', in E. Green, J. Owen & D. Pain (eds), *Gendered by design? Information technology and office systems*, Taylor & Francis, London and Washington D.C., pp. 95–110; J. Wajcman, 'The feminisation of work in the information age', pp. 459–74; J. Webster (1993), 'From the word processor to the micro: gender issues in the development of information technology in the office', in *Gendered by design,* pp. 111–23.

[5] H. Braverman (1998 [1974]), *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 226–27; D.F. Noble (1984), *Forces of production: A social history of industrial automation*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, pp. 57–78; R. Sennett (1998), *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York & London.

[6] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, pp. 36–55; R. Hill (1984), 'From hot metal to cold type: New technology in the newspaper industry', *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 9, pp. 161–75; A. Marshall (1983), *Changing the word: The printing industry in transition*, Comedia Publishing Group, London, pp. 10–14; M. Wallace & A.L. Kalleberg (1982), 'Industrial transformation and the decline of craft: the decomposition of skill in the printing industry, 1931–1978', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 3,pp. 307–24; A. Zimbalist (1979), 'Technology and the labor process in the printing industry', in Zimbalist (ed.), *Case studies on the labor process*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 103–26; J. Shields (1995), 'Deskilling revisited: Continuity and change in craft work and apprenticeship in late nineteenth century New South Wales', *Labour History*, vol. 68, pp. 1–29; J. Shields (1995), 'A matter of skill: the rise of compulsory apprenticeship in early twentieth century New South Wales', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 236–62.

[7] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 19–23; R. Frances (1991), 'Marginal matters: Gender, skill, unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – A case study of the Australian printing industry 1925–1937', *Labour History*, no. 61, pp. 17–29.

half of the twentieth century, however, the printing industry – once the high-status bastion of traditional mark-making – was facing dramatic structural transformation and a steep learning curve. The public's demand for printed matter continued to rise. The machinery required to produce printed products swiftly was becoming ever more computerised and automated, making it increasingly attractive to employers,[8] and by the mid-1980s new and growing economies in Asia provided cheap alternative sources for printing. In addition, the protections that had been afforded to Australian domestic manufacturers had been whittled away in most industries, to be replaced by economic rationalist approaches to political economy.[9]

As a result, the period from the 1960s to the late 1980s saw the virtual extinction of hot-metal typesetting and letterpress printing in developed capitalist nations. This period also witnessed the mainstream introduction into the printing industry as a whole of computerised typesetting and high-speed offset-lithographic printing. This three-decade period saw the almost complete disappearance of traditional printing trades such as stereotyping, electrotyping, dot-etching and engraving, hand-binding, hand-embossing, hand-composing, paper-ruling, Linotype and Monotype operation and pre-press camera operation.

What happened in the printing industry belongs to a larger story; it is part of a global transition in developed economies, a process of de-industrialisation and a shift away from welfare-state models towards neo-liberal free-market economics.[10] Long-standing industrial relationships and deeply ingrained hierarchical processes were altered beyond recognition. This was indeed a case where 'all that is solid melts into air' – to quote Marshall Berman (who himself was quoting Karl Marx).[11] In other words, the old certainties of the modern era were disintegrating before

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[8] A. Marshall, op. cit., p. 10–14.

[9] M. Webber & S. Weller (2001), 'Producing Australia, restructuring Australia', in *Refashioning the rag trade: Internationalising Australia's textiles, clothing and footwear industries*, UNSW Press, Sydney, pp. 10–37.

[10] H. Braverman, (1998 [1974]), *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York; R. Sennett (1998), *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York & London; M. Webber & S. Weller, op. cit.

[11] K. Marx, 'Speech at the anniversary of the *People's Paper*', in R.C. Tucker (1978), *The Marx and Engels reader*, second edn., Norton, London, p. 475–76, quoted and discussed in M. Berman (1988 [1982]), *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity*, Penguin, New York and London, p. 21.

workers' eyes. A 'job for life' was no longer guaranteed and the skills of a trade soon became an old-fashioned encumbrance.

What happened when the printing industry was on the cusp of this change, in the awkward 'in-between' stages? Many printers felt their impending precariousness keenly. In this context, many factory spaces combined 'old' and 'new' technologies in cobbled-together arrangements. The status quo was never ideal, however; more often than not, it was the result of compromise and affordability. What can the early stages of this digital conversion tell us about how complex systems evolve and about how people and collectives cope when faced with dramatic (but often clumsy) technological and social transformation?

This is where I began.

1. Introduction

Fig. 1 **NSW Government Printing Office patch**, courtesy of Ray Utick. Photograph by the author.

Introduction

Precarious Printers is an interdisciplinary historical study that demonstrates the dense inter-connectedness of labour, technology, material culture and the culture of working life. This dissertation operates on two levels: theory and content. On the one hand, it reveals a theoretical approach that consciously intermingles labour history with an attention to material culture, bringing a consideration of spaces, objects and embodied experience into an historical analysis of workers and working life. On the other hand, *Precarious Printers* is also an historical study of an institution at a particular period of time. It explores the three-decade period prior to the closure of the New South Wales (NSW) Government Printing Office, Sydney, namely 1959 to 1989.

Of late, research in the fields of design history and material culture studies has been less engaged with the politics of labour and the culture of working life, with more emphasis on innovation, consumption and designers.[1] Design historian Kjetil Fallan has observed that:

> The anthropological strand of material culture studies has often focused so strongly on the consumption side that the production side has been left more or less unexplored … the field of material culture studies has not provided any ready template for research into the relations between spheres of production and consumption.[2]

On the other side of this disciplinary spectrum, the discipline of labour history has engaged to

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[1] There are exceptions to this pattern, and design history in the 1980s and 1990s tended to be more engaged with production than is the case today. For engagements with both material culture and labour see: M. Berg (1979), *Technology and toil in 19th century Britain,* CSE Books, London; E. Lupton (1993), *Mechanical brides: Women and machines from home to office*, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum & Princeton Architectural Press, New York; M. Diani (1989), 'The social design of office automation', in V. Margolin (ed.), *Design discourse: History / theory / criticism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, pp. 67–76; P. Parthasarathi & G. Riello (2009), *The spinning world: A global history of cotton textiles,* Oxford University Press, Oxford. For early calls for a closer examination of design in relation to production, see T. Fry (1982), 'Unpacking the typewriter', *Block*, vol. 7, pp. 36–47; T. Fry (1988), *Design history Australia: A source text in methods and resources*, Hale & Iremonger, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney, p. 70. Joan Livingstone and John Ploof's edited collection *The object of labor*, examined some of these issues, but chiefly in relation to textile production and the visual arts. See J. Livingstone & J. Ploof (eds) (2007), *The object of labor: Art, cloth, and cultural production*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press and MIT Press, Chicago, London & Cambridge, Mass.

[2] K. Fallan (2010), *Design history: Understanding theory and method*, Berg, Oxford & New York, p. 37.

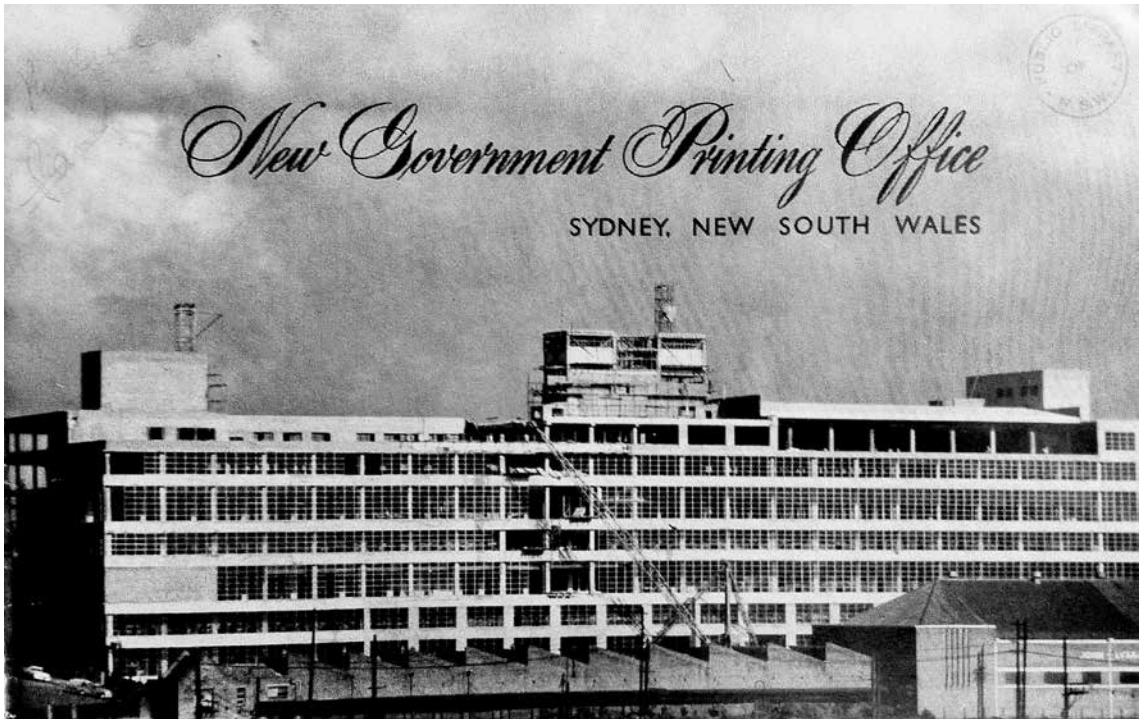

Fig. 2 **Cover of the 1957 promotional publication,** ***New Government Printing Office*****,** in the collection of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

some extent with material culture (chiefly in relation to archaeology and museum studies)[3]; in Australian labour history, however, there have been concerns that prioritising material culture can lead to superficial interpretations that ignore worker experience.[4] This dissertation asserts a method for collectively examining workers' experiences of technological change, employment precarity and industrial decline in the second-half of the twentieth century. It approaches these issues in a manner that retains the voices of workers (including through oral history), and adds

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[3] For discussions about the relationship between labour history and material culture, see: A. Green (2006), 'Perambulating scrapbooks and saloon-sawdust sifters: Ghosts along the labor/material culture trail', *Western Folklore*, vol. 65, no. 1/2, pp. 31–46; B. Oliver & A. Reeves (2003), 'Crossing disciplinary boundaries: Labour history and museum studies', *Labour History*, vol. 85, November, pp. 1–7; G. Michelson, (2000), 'Labour history and culture: An overview', *Labour History*, vol. 79, November, pp. 1–10. For limited examples from labour history that are attendant to material culture, see: D. McIntyre (2005), 'Making and remaking the boilermaker at the Newcastle Steelworks, 1915–85', *Labour History*, vol. 89, November, pp. 215–24; C. Fahey, J. Lack & L. Dale-Hallett (2003), 'Resurrecting the Sunshine Harvester Works: Re-presenting and reinterpreting the experience of industrial work in twentieth century Australia', *Labour History*, vol. 85, November, pp. 9–28; K. Muir (2000), 'Feminism and representations of union identity in Australian union banners of the 1980s and early 1990s', *Labour History*, vol. 79, November, pp. 92–112. Artefacts and ephemera are also listed as 'movable items of labour heritage' in R. Irving & L. Taksa (2002), *Places, protests, and memorabilia: The labour heritage register of New South Wales*, vol. 43, Industrial Relations Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

[4] See for example: I. Stuart (1992), 'Stranger in a strange land: Historical archaeology and history in a post-contact Australia', *Public History Review*, vol. 1, pp. 136–47; L. Taksa (2000), ' "Pumping the life-blood into politics and place": Labour culture and the Eveleigh Railway Workshop', *Labour History*, vol. 79, November, pp. 11–34; L. Taksa (2003), 'Machines and ghosts: Politics, industrial heritage, and the history of working life at Eveleigh workshops', *Labour History*, vol. 85, November, pp. 65–88; L. Taksa (2005), 'The material culture of an industrial artifact: Interpreting control, defiance, and the everyday', *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 8–27.

a relevant consideration of design and material culture in the workplace by paying attention to the role of objects, spaces and the embodied experience of technology.

1959 to 1989 were the years that the Government Printing Office (hereafter known as 'the Gov') operated from a centralised printing factory in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Ultimo,[5] before the Liberal State Government, under the leadership of Premier Nick Greiner, abruptly closed it down in mid-1989, with only four weeks' notice.[6] In these final three decades, the Gov was a troubled institution. Being both an official instrument of government authority and an industrial plant with a vigorous union presence, the Gov was a complex network of people, technologies, bureaucratic systems and printed matter, held together by sometimes-incompatible values and objectives. The organisation was pulled in conflicting directions by traditionalists, Masons, unionists, progressive reformers, economic rationalists and those somewhere in between.

From the late 1960s the printing industry – traditionally characterised by a masculine 'craft' culture and strong union control – began several major transitions, as briefly noted in the Preface. As with the rest of the printing industry, the Gov underwent two dramatic technological transformations between the 1970s and late 1980s: the phase-out of letterpress printing in favour of offset-lithography and the obsolescence of hot-metal typesetting, following the introduction of computerised typesetting technologies. Between 1977 and 1989, there was a situation where 'old' and 'new' technologies coexisted in the same factory spaces at the Gov,

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[5] To be precise, the NSW Government Printing Office's functions were not restricted to the Ultimo building. By 1988 there were 26 branch offices in Sydney's Central Business District (CBD), and in regional areas of NSW. Branch offices produced photocopying and small-offset work (similar to a quick-print copy shop).

[6] The Government Printing Office was abolished in 25 July 1989. In September 1989 a small agency, the Government Printing Service (GPS) was set up. The GPS was a brokerage service between the public service and private agencies, and it managed the *NSW Government Gazette*; other publications were delegated to the NSW Parliamentary Counsel's Office. The GPS was abolished in 2002 and replaced by CM Solutions, an agency that resulted from the amalgamation of State Mail, the GPS, and the Government Information Service. CM Solutions dissolved in 2005 and the responsibility for government publications (which were swiftly becoming a digital matter) was handed to Salmat Document Management Solutions. A small number of the Gov's employees continued working at CM Solutions and Salmat. See: Public Service Notices (1989), NSW Government, Sydney, 6 September, p. 6; Public Service Notices (1989), NSW Government, Sydney, 13 September, p. 4; NSW Government Directory (1990), NSW Government, Sydney, July, pp. 31–33; *NSW Government Gazette* (1992), NSW Government, Sydney, 2nd edn, pp. 34–35; Department of Public Works and Services (1996), *Annual Report*, Sydney, 30 June, pp. 25–26. See also NSW State Records administrative history note: http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Entity.aspx?Path=%5CAgency%5C1154, visited 9 February 2013.

with letterpress machines operating next to offset-lithographic presses and Linotype machines operating in tandem with computer typesetting equipment. By the early 1980s letterpress was perceived as 'over' by much of the Western printing industry, and high-speed offset-lithography and computerised typesetting were increasingly dominant.[7]

The Gov was one of the last remaining printing factories in developed capitalist nations to use letterpress, hot-metal typesetting and hand-binding on a large scale. The traditions of government publishing were not easily adapted to the new technologies and in this sense the maintenance of traditional design dictated the continued use of older technologies. The Gov's transition from a letterpress printery into a computerised office (which was well underway by 1984) was not without its difficulties and it produced tensions that came to be expressed through workplace practices and material surroundings, as well as within the narratives that the Gov's employees constructed – and continue to reshape – about themselves and their former workplace.

Due to the complexity of an interdisciplinary dissertation – both an historical study and a theoretical integration of fields – this introduction is necessarily lengthy; however section organisation delineates a path through these intersecting arenas. This introductory chapter first introduces the Gov and then establishes the interdisciplinary approach and the relevant existing literature, before justifying why a consideration of material culture is crucial in this case. The Introduction then outlines briefly the primary sources used in *Precarious Printers* and unpacks the issue of theorising labour for government employees, as opposed to workers in private industry. Finally, the Introduction sets the economic and political scene in Sydney between 1959 and 1989, well exemplified by the changing shape of Ultimo and Darling Harbour.

The dissertation as a whole is organised into three parts. 'Part I: Image, Space, Voice' establishes my methodological and theoretical use of oral history, photography and spatial analysis.

[7] That said, aspects of moveable type and letterpress printing are currently undergoing something of an artisanal and craft revival, but I will leave the analysis of this trend to other researchers.

Chapter Two – a methodological oral history chapter – explores the possibilities that open up for historical analysis when oral histories are paired with photographs. Chapter Three sets the scene, quite literally: it is an architectural and spatial exploration of the Gov's building. I argue that spatial memory is a strong part of oral history content and that the spatial and architectural parameters of the Gov are a significant element of its history.

'Part II: Technological Transitions' is about how workers coped with particular technological changes at the Gov; the shift from letterpress to offset-lithography and the transition from hot-metal typesetting to computer phototypesetting. Chapter Four examines the experience of press-machinists at the Gov, many of whom retrained in lithography, letting go of their old skills in letterpress printing. This chapter particularly emphasises the significant place that machinery – the presses themselves – had in how the workers understood and redefined their identities as skilled, masculine craftsmen printers. From 1981 to 1985 computerised phototypesetting was incrementally introduced at the Gov and gradually letterpress machines were replaced with new lithographic machines. The Monotype section was closed down in 1984 and Linotype gradually phased out throughout the 1980s. Chapter Five outlines the history of compositors (those who set the type) and reviews the way in which these changes altered the gender division of labour in typesetting. Chapter Six focuses more specifically on compositors at the Gov, emphasising how the change in technology (from hot-metal to computerisation) was accompanied by a change in attitudes, from collective identities and practices towards an increasingly individualised focus on self-realisation and self-initiated occupational retraining.

'Part III: Challenges & Creative Resilience' explores the creative, resourceful and sometimes resistant tactics that workers employed as a way of coping with institutional sexism, the drudgery of work and job insecurity. In this part, Chapters Seven and Eight examine the experience of women at the Gov, detailing the ways in which they coped with working life in a male-dominated industrial environment. Chapter Seven looks to the experience of 'non-tradeswomen' – that is, women who worked as assistants, table-hands and in senior management. The women who trained as printing apprentices had different experiences in relation to printing, embodied

practice and shop floor politics; their experience is explored in Chapter Eight. Finally, Chapter Nine examines the unofficial and sometimes underhanded practices of foreign orders and other creative transgressions at the Gov. At a time of industrial decline and increasing job insecurity, manual creativity and play became an important part of workplace survival, as well as being part of the industrial folklore of Australian workplaces. More details about the content of these chapters will be revealed throughout this Introduction.

Introducing the NSW Government Printing Office

The Gov was an enormous and complex institution; it was a government-run industrial factory and a service department that aimed to combine all of the printing trades and apprentice education under one roof. The NSW Government Printing Office was established in the colony by Governor George Gipps in 1840. Similar institutions existed in other Australian capital cities, in the Pacific and in the United Kingdom, where it is known as Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO). At its largest and busiest – between the 1920s and the 1960s – the Gov printed almost all state government materials as well as some Commonwealth material. It employed approximately 1200 workers in 1920, more than 900 in 1961 and when it closed in 1989 it employed 845 men and women.[8] While a small number of those workers continued to be employed at a newly-created agency called the Government Printing Service, more than 700 employees were made redundant in 1989.

Until mid-1989, the Gov composed, printed, bound and distributed Parliamentary and legal materials, such as Bills, Acts, *Hansard* (parliamentary proceedings) and the *New South Wales Government Gazette*. Its primary responsibility was to meet the printing needs of the NSW Parliament, but the Gov also produced a large variety of publications for state government departments. Over time, the Gov's output expanded to include a wide variety of products, for example, the electoral roll, ballot papers, departmental annual reports, birth, death and marriage certificates, Lotto tickets, duty stamps, school examinations, school exercise books, maps and

[8] R.C. Peck (2001), *NSW Government Printers and Inspectors of Stamps*, self-published, Sydney, p. 51.

transport tickets. As well as standard typesetting and printing responsibilities, the Gov provided government departments, politicians, lawyers and judges with specialist handwork services such as hand-binding law books in half-calf leather, embossing, gold leaf, die-stamping, envelope making, photo-etching and official state photographic services.

Analysing the Gov enables us to see particularly clearly a clash of ideas about how to organise a complex institution and how to cope with the socio-technical challenges of governing, making, working and belonging in a particular historical moment. Because it was a government establishment, the Gov differed from the commercial printing industry. Its priorities were originally about access to information and about the production of governmental authority in tangible form, not about efficiency and profit. Many of its clients were proponents of formal, Parliamentary-style design and they demanded long-established traditional processes, despite associated inefficiencies. Some of its employees were 'lifers' – having started there as 'runner boys' and moved through the apprenticeship system – and some assumed that employment at the Gov would ensure they had a 'job for life'.

By the 1980s, the political momentum of federal and state governance in Australia turned increasingly towards the politics of economic rationalism. Government-run enterprises became targets for closure, charged with the argument that private industry could do the job more affordably.[9] Those who advocated reform in the NSW Public Service envisioned that the Gov could become a progressive, efficient, computerised centre for handling government data. Hard-line economic rationalists and the private printing industry called for its closure, arguing that the Gov was inefficient and a 'hotbed' of industrial activity. Given the Gov was a union stronghold for the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (PKIU), almost any issue involving technological change led to shop-floor tensions, discontent and industrial action. In this context, the Gov's

[9] B. Kingston (2006), *A history of New South Wales*, Cambridge University Press, New York and Melbourne, pp. 232–33; L. Colley, (2005), 'How secure was that public service job? Redundancy in the Queensland Public Service', *Labour History*, vol. 89, November, pp. 141–57.

very existence came into question in a way it never had before.[10] These conflicting interests became thoroughly embedded within practices, machines and spaces at the Gov.

What happens to the people who are caught up in this change, what strategies do they use to survive, how do they cope with the looming threat of redundancy? In examining these issues, *Precarious Printers* weaves together source materials from oral history, photographic collections and archives to ask how people, technologies and spaces were mobilised to cope with precarity and change (or, in some cases, a lack of change). Their responses varied from complete resistance to adaptation, from denial to acceptance. In answering these questions, two main behaviours and practices are identified: *building alliances* and *unofficial creative production*. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, both these elements are closely connected to material culture, embodied experience and to practices of designing and making.

Building alliances

In its final decades, the Gov's employees came to grips with their precarious circumstances by developing alliances with people and/or with technologies. This involved staking out territories (either spatially, or by developing their skills). Some workers clung to their traditional trade skills and collective practices with pride and defiance, while others embraced new technologies with enthusiasm and an individualistic drive for self-improvement. As these new technologies (such as computerised typesetting systems) increasingly faced obsolescence, however, the individually-driven exercise of 'self-development' risked becoming inexorable and exhausting.

The tactic of 'building alliances', a continual theme throughout this dissertation, is particularly prevalent in Part II. As noted, Chapter Four explores how press-machinists allied themselves with particular masculine craft identities, and specifically with press machinery, during

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[10] 'Printers fear redundancy, select committee told' (1979), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May, p. 14; P. Kennedy (1979), 'Work of Printing Office queried', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 April, p. 9; G. Porter (1988) 'Unions united stand to save Government Printing Office', *PKIU State News*, November – December, p. 1; 'Too many late reports' (1987), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June, p. 1; 'Off course' (1982), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March, p. 12.

the technological change from letterpress to lithography. Chapter Six outlines how (some) compositors enthusiastically allied themselves with computer technologies and new identities as service workers. Again, the limitations and possibilities offered by new technologies were significant factors in the workers' responses to technological upheaval. Chapter Seven reveals some of the ways in which women recreated and reformulated particular spaces within the Gov's building, in a male-dominated industrial context. Chapter Eight examines the ways in which female apprentices at the Gov had knowledgeable and embodied relationships with machinery and skill that often went unrecognised, partly due to a workplace preoccupation with heavy lifting.

Unofficial creative production

As explored throughout this dissertation (particularly in Part III) many of the Gov's employees enacted their own narratives – of resilience, of belonging and even of industrial decline – through unsanctioned creative practices. Throughout my research, former employees introduced me to their 'extracurricular' practices at work. This included the clandestine production of printed materials (or 'foreign orders' in printing slang), as well as better-known shop-floor antics such as pranks, practical jokes, games and rites-of-passage for apprentices. There was a rich culture of humour, irreverence, creative (and sometimes resistant) practice going on within the walls of the Gov. This mode of unofficial creative production should not be dismissed as a trivial part of the workers' story. Indeed, the exercise of creativity was one of the means through which the workers survived the workplace uncertainty that they underwent in the 1980s. These matters are closely examined in Chapter Nine, on the practice of 'foreign orders', shop floor play and unauthorised creative practices. Unofficial creative production at the Gov is also touched upon in Chapter Four, for example, press-machinist Ray Utick's amateur film *Letterpress Machines of the Government Printing Office* (1966) is described and interpreted.

As well as analysing workers' experiences of technological, social and economic transformation, *Precarious Printers* proposes that labour history, oral history and material culture are disciplines that can be combined fruitfully in an historical study. The focus on material culture and

technology in history need not be merely about aesthetic or surface considerations; it is fully implicated by the social and political. The following section explains this theoretical and methodological contribution to knowledge in more detail.

An interdisciplinary approach to history, labour and material culture

Labour historian Lucy Taksa has argued emphatically that Australia's treatment of industrial heritage too often falls into a celebration of industrial architecture and an aestheticisation of obsolete industrial machinery.[11] In making this argument, Taksa's focus is on public history and, more specifically on the heritage treatment of the Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney. Like the Gov, these workshops were a government-run industrial enterprise that was closed down by the NSW State Government in 1989. Taksa's concern is that the material culture pertaining to the Eveleigh Railway Workshops has been appreciated only for its aesthetic and nostalgic potential and it 'has been disassociated from its social and labour history'.[12] Taksa fears that the more intangible parts of Eveleigh's industrial history have been lost, such as workplace folklore, industrial relations history, work practices and human stories. She therefore warns against public historical approaches to the industrial past that emphasise material culture and architecture, as this might risk an overly simplistic celebration of technology, and/or a fetishisation of machinery and industrial buildings.[13]

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[11] L. Taksa, 'Machines and ghosts', pp. 65–88; L. Taksa, ' "Pumping the life-blood into politics and place"', pp. 11–34; L. Taksa, 'The material culture of an industrial artifact', pp. 8–27; L. Taksa (2008), 'Globalisation and the memorialising of railway industrial heritage', *Historical Environment*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 11–19; L. Taksa (2009), 'Labor history and public history in Australia: Allies or uneasy bedfellows', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 76, Fall, p. 89; L. Taksa (2006), 'Australian attitudes to industrial railway heritage in global perspective', in P. Bertola & B. Oliver (eds), *The workshops: A history of the Midland Government Railway Workshops*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, pp. 259–79.

[12] L. Taksa, 'Machines and ghosts', p. 66.

[13] ibid. See also the concerns raised about the relationship between history, material culture (and the discipline of archaeology) in I. Stuart, op. cit., p. 144. Having said that Lucy Taksa is concerned about the simplistic use of material culture in labour history (and particularly in public history), Taksa's own work fruitfully uses material culture as part of a working class analysis. See for example: L. Taksa (2002), 'Retooling the class factory: Response 3, Family, childhood and identities: Working class history from a personalised perspective', *Labour History*, vol. 82, May, pp. 127–33.

Does labour history have to be disassociated from material culture? My position is that this need not be the case.[14] While Taksa's argument certainly makes sense in relation to the public historical treatment of the Eveleigh Workshops, I contend that, if executed properly, combining the history of labour with attention to material culture can be a highly effective interdisciplinary approach. This historical recovery of the Government Printing Office takes into account the culture of working life; at the same time, the active and influential role of material culture is not forgotten, nor is it trivialised through an out-of-context celebration of industrial machinery. Here, human stories and material culture are tightly interconnected, each bearing upon the other. This approach can illuminate the complex and entangled ways in which people and technical worlds are sometimes allied, sometimes in opposition. It also allows us to learn of the (unauthorised) creative and resilient practices that can emerge in difficult industrial contexts. Paying attention to material culture also means paying heed to what might be considered minor details and making room for embodied experience and unofficial production in the analysis of labour and the workplace.

This approach means that *Precarious Printers* is an interdisciplinary historical recovery project, fitting somewhere between labour history, material culture studies and oral history studies of working life. It should be evident by now that this project does not constitute a traditional institutional history of the Gov. It does not chart each significant event that occurred at the organisation between 1959 and 1989, nor does it definitively provide all of the political or industrial answers related to the 1989 closure. Who or what might have been 'at fault' regarding the demise of the Gov – and the mismanagement of the closure that followed – remains a complex matter with no single culprit or cause. My approach offers a variety of perspectives and interpretations, from workers and managers, from the media and clients, as well as my own assessment of the three decades in question. I am not concerned with laying blame. Rather, I seek to give some palpable life to this institution's history, particularly its later decades, which

[14] See A. Green, op. cit., for a 2006 analysis on the relationship between labour history and material culture in American academic discourse. His analysis suggests that labour historians have been cautious about the use of material culture, but that studies of folklore have been more open to including tangible artefacts into their field. See B. Oliver & A. Reeves, op. cit., for a discussion of the relationship between labour history and material culture – in this case the issues are framed in relation to museums, exhibitions and museum studies.

have passed mostly unremarked in existing histories of government printing in Australia. While we may have official records of the main events and dates pertaining to this institution's history, the workplace culture and embodied experience of the Gov has not, until now, been recorded as a part of Sydney's twentieth century industrial and governmental history. While we no longer have access to the buildings that housed the Government Printing Office, and while many artefacts from the period have been lost, this study still uses a wide variety of primary and secondary sources: oral histories from workers, photographic collections (both official and worker photographs), amateur film, staff publications, tools and archival documentation from NSW State Records.[15]

Existing studies of printing in labour history and sociology

The most thorough historical analysis of the printing industry in Australia can be found in the discipline of labour history, where historians Raelene Frances and James Hagan,[16] among others, have analysed the complex relationships that evolved between workers, unions, employers, trade demarcation and technological innovation. In her analysis of the boot, clothing and printing trades in Victoria, Frances deftly draws together issues of gender, technological change, definitions of 'skill' and industrial relations.[17] Both Frances and Hagan use a close examination of industrial disputes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an approach that I have not taken in this particular study.

Instead, I have looked closely at 'working life' at the Gov. This project hones in on the lived experiences of employees from a variety of occupations, trades and skill levels (including

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[15] In this way, this study of the Gov is similar to the historical recovery situation at the Sunshine Harvester Works in Victoria, albeit at a smaller scale. See C. Fahey, J. Lack & L. Dale-Hallett, op. cit.

[16] See for example: J. Hagan (1966), *Printers and politics: A history of Australian printing unions 1850-1950*, Australian National University Press, Canberra; J. Hagan (1973), 'Craft power', *Labour History*, no. 24, pp. 159–75; R. Frances (1993), *The politics of work: Gender and labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne; R. Frances (1991), 'Marginal matters: Gender, skill, unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – A case study of the Australian printing industry 1925–1937', *Labour History*, no. 61, pp. 17–29; G. Souter (1981), *Company of Heralds: A century and a half of Australian publishing by John Fairfax Limited and its predecessors 1831–1981*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

[17] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, op. cit.; R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', op. cit. See also R. Frances, L. Kealey & J. Sangster (1996), 'Women and wage labour in Australia and Canada, 1880–1980', *Labour History*, vol. 71, pp. 54–89.

non-tradespersons, apprenticed tradespersons and managers). Crucially, working life entails not only the official production of the institution, but the unofficial, unreported acts that go on in the workplace. In this way I am following labour historian John Shields' use of the term 'working life' in his edited oral history collection *All our labours*,[18] which has been influential in shaping my approach to interpreting and re-telling the oral histories of print workers from the Gov. Other influential historians – whose lively histories of work and working life have opened up the possibilities of Australian labour history – include Grace Karskens, Graham Seal, Bobbie Oliver, Sue Rosen and Taksa, among others.[19]

One discipline that overlaps with labour history is the history of technology. British and American work in this field offers useful parallels with other industries, in terms of workers' adaptations to technological change, and the gender and class implications of these shifts. In this discipline the work of Ava Baron (on gender, deskilling and the American printing industry), and Ruth Oldenziel and Roger Horowitz (on gender, labour and technological change) has been particularly instructive.[20] In addition, British and American labour historians and social theorists such as James Meyer, Steven Maynard, Paul Willis and Paul

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[18] J. Shields ed. (1992), *All our labours: Oral histories of working life in twentieth century Sydney*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.

[19] See for example: J. Kimber & P. Love (eds) (2007), *The time of their lives: The eight hour day and working life*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Melbourne; G. Seal (1989), 'The folklore of work', in *The hidden culture: Folklore in Australian society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 109–31; B. Oliver (2009), 'Making foreigners at the Midland Government Railway Workshops', in J. Harris (ed.), *Foreigners: Secret artefacts of industrialism*, Black Swan Press, Perth, pp. 26–37; L. Taksa, ' "Pumping the life-blood" '; L. Taksa, 'Machines and ghosts'; Taksa (2005), 'The material culture of an industrial artifact: Interpreting control, defiance, and the everyday', *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 8–27; G. Karskens (1992), 'Spinning yarns: An oral history of working life at Bonds Cotton Spinning Mill, Pendle Hill, 1923–1988', in *All our labours,* op. cit., pp. 10–46; S. Rosen (1992), 'Not bringing home the bacon: The death of the State Abattoir, Homebush', in *All our labours,* op. cit., pp. 227–43; D. McIntyre (2005), 'Making and remaking the boilermaker at the Newcastle Steelworks, 1915–85', *Labour History*, vol. 89, November, pp. 215–24.

[20] See for example: A. Baron (1991), 'An "other" side of gender antagonism at work: Men, boys, and the remasculinisation of printers' work, 1830–1920', in A. Baron (ed.), *Work engendered*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, pp. 47–69; A. Baron (1989), 'Questions of gender: Deskilling and demasculinisation in the US printing industry 1830–1915', *Gender & History*, vol. 1, no. 2,pp. 178–99; R. Oldenziel (1999), *Making technology masculine: Men, women and modern machines in America, 1870–1945*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam; N.E. Lerman, A.P. Mohun & Oldenziel (1997), 'Versatile tools: Gender analysis and the history of technology', *Technology & Culture*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 1–8; R. Halpern & R. Horowitz (1999), *Meatpackers: An oral history of black packinghouse workers and their struggle for racial and economic equality*, Monthly Review Press, New York; R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys? Masculinity, technology and class in America*, Routledge, New York & London.

Thompson provided a framework for interpreting labour relations in an era of increasing automation and declining manufacturing sectors.[21]

The focus of most existing labour history research on the printing industry falls on the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. To find more recent historical examinations of technological change in the printing industry, one must look to the discipline of sociology, and particularly to studies of gender and the labour process, from the 1980s and 1990s. In Australia and New Zealand significant analyses emerged from sociologists and theorists such as Raewyn Connell, Ann Game, Roberta Hill, Marjorie Johnston, Rosemary Pringle and Rosslyn Reed.[22] On an international level, the most significant and influential examination of technological change, gender and the printing industry can be found in the work of British sociologist Cynthia Cockburn.[23] Other sociologists who have examined technological change in printing emphasise the (often negative) impact of technological change on workers,[24] but, unlike Cockburn, these publications are usually less attuned to the way in which technologies intersect with issues of gender, power and the relations of production.

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[21] S. Meyer (2001), 'Work, play, and power: Masculine culture on the automotive shop floor, 1930–1960', in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys,* op. cit., pp. 13–32; S. Maynard (1989), 'Rough work and rugged men: The social construction of masculinity in working class history', *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 23, Spring, pp. 159–69; P. Willis (1979), 'Shop floor culture, masculinity, and the wage form', in J. Clarke, C. Critcher & R. Johnson (eds), *Working-class culture: Studies in history and theory*, Hutchinson, in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham, London, pp. 185–98; P. Thompson (1983), *The nature of work: The introduction to debates on the labour process*, Macmillan, Houndmills and London; P. Thompson (1988), 'Playing at being skilled men: Factory culture and pride in work skills among Coventry car workers', *Social History*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 45–69.

[22] R. Reed (1988), 'From hot metal to cold type printing technology', in E. Willis (ed.), *Technology and the labour process: Australasian case studies*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 33–50; R. Reed (1987), 'Making newspapers pay: Employment of women's skills in newspaper production', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 25–40; M. Johnston (1989), *Jobs for the girls*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne; A. Game & R. Pringle (1983), *Gender at work*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston; R. Hill (1984), 'From hot metal to cold type: New technology in the newspaper industry', *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 9, pp. 161–75; R.W. Connell (1995), *Masculinities*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney & Oxford; R.W. Connell (2006), 'Glass ceilings or gendered Institutions? Mapping the gender regimes of public sector worksites', *Public Administration Review*, November-December, pp. 837–49.

[23] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*; C.Cockburn, (1999 [1981]), 'The material of male power', in D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman (eds), *The social shaping of technology*, 2nd edn, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, pp. 177–98, originally published in (1981), 'The material of male power', *Feminist Review* 9, pp. 41–58; C. Cockburn (1985), *Machinery of dominance: Women, men and technical know-how*, Pluto Press, London, Sydney, Dover.

[24] M. Wallace & A.L. Kalleberg (1982), 'Industrial transformation and the decline of craft: the decomposition of skill in the printing industry, 1931–1978', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 307–24; T.F. Rogers & N.S. Friedman (1980), *Printers face automation: The impact of technology on work and retirement among skilled craftsmen*, Lexington Books, Lexington and Toronto; A. Zimbalist (1979), 'Technology and the labor process in the printing industry', in A. Zimbalist (ed.), *Case studies on the labor process*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 103–26.

Feminist sociologists such as Cockburn, Judy Wajcman and Reed (among others) wrote insightfully in the 1980s and 1990s about the relationships between gender, the labour process and technological change, sometimes in direct relation to the printing industry.[25] It was Cockburn's influential text *Brothers* – on British newspaper compositors in the late 1970s – that originally piqued my interest in the relationship between gender and technological change in the printing industry.[26] Cockburn's evocative description of Linotype operators using their machines led me to suspect that there was more that could be said about the role that material culture and embodied practice plays in a printer's experience of technological change.[27] The personal encouragement of Reed, Wajcman and Connell also pushed me on with this pursuit.[28] Given this background, issues of gender, power and skill are an ongoing presence in these chapters on the Gov.

Existing histories of government printing

The following section briefly outlines the existing histories of government printing in New South Wales, to provide background context. The history of government printing in the colony of NSW began prior to the creation of the Government Printing Office. There is some disagreement as to who was the first official printer for the government in NSW. Some claim it was George Hughes,[29] others suggest it was a man of a very similar name, George Howe.[30] Although Captain Arthur Phillip transported a wooden screw-press to the colony in 1788,

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[25] R. Reed (1999), 'Journalism and technology practice since the Second World War', in A. Curthoys & J. Schultz (eds), *Journalism: Print, politics and popular culture*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, pp. 218–28; R. Reed (1994), 'Anti-discrimination language and discriminatory outcomes: Employers' discourse on women in printing and allied trades', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 89–106; J. Wajcman (1991), *Feminism confronts technology*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney; J. Wajcman (2009 [2006]), 'The feminisation of work in the information age', in D.G. Johnson & J.M. Wetmore (eds), *Technology & society: Building our sociotechnical future*, MIT Press, London and Cambridge, Mass., pp. 459–74.

[26] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*.

[27] ibid., pp. 48, 96, 101.

[28] I am grateful for the encouragement given to me by Rosslyn Reed when I met with her in 2011, and for the enthusiasm and sage advice provided by Judy Wajcman at the *Gender Bodies & Technology* conference in Virginia in April 2012. Raewyn Connell's advice and support in August 2012 and December 2013 is also greatly appreciated.

[29] B. Cooper (1963), 'The Government Printing Office of New South Wales and its role as a publisher', Diploma of Librarianship thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney, p. 3; R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 6.

[30] G.T. Dick (1977), *Printed by authority*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p. 1; G. Powell (1952), 'Tickets by the hundred million', *Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday Magazine)*, 28 June, p. 7; NSW Public Service Board (1965), 'Know your departments: The Government Printing Office', *Progress: NSW Public Service Board Journal*, vol. 4, no. 4, p. 14.

it sat unused for at least seven years, because of the lack of skilled printers.[31] George Hughes is recorded as printing at least 200 government orders from 1795 to 1800, when he left the colony.[32] Hughes was followed by George Howe, the man hailed as the 'father of print' in the NSW colony.[33] Howe, who was transported to Sydney in 1800 on the *Royal Admiral II* for the crime of theft, was responsible for printing the first official newspaper for the Colonial Government, the *Gazette*, later known as the *Government Gazette*.[34] Howe's son, Robert Howe, continued the printing of the *Gazette* and other government orders.[35] He published the first volume of Acts for the colony in 1827, as well as publishing the *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser.*[36] Although the latter publication contained government notices, it was run privately by Howe, who increasingly prioritised printing for the Wesleyan mission over that of government work.[37] To add further complication, other printers such as Horatio Wills and Richard Mansfield also conducted government printing after George Howe's death in 1829.[38] This situation meant that from 1829 to 1840 there was no official Government Printer.

Prior to the creation of a government printing office, Governor Gipps put out tenders for printers to produce work for the government. Gipps found, however, that these printers did not prioritise work for the government and often failed to meet deadlines.[39] He complained that the printers 'did not feel themselves obliged to fulfil their engagements', and scarce competition did not compel them to work faster.[40] On 21 November 1840 the Colonial Government announced its intention to establish an official Government Printing Office, under the exclusive control and orders of the government. The printer John Kitchen was appointed the first official Government

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31 R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 6; Public Service Board, 'Know your departments', op. cit., p. 13.

32 ibid.; B. Cooper, op. cit., p. 3.

33 G. Powell, op. cit., p. 7; NSW Public Service Board, 'Know your departments', op. cit., pp. 14–15.

34 G.T. Dick, op. cit., p. 1.

35 R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 6.

36 B. Cooper, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

37 J.V. Byrnes (1966), 'Howe, George (1769–1821)', in *Australian dictionary of biography*, vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, online at http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/howe-george-1600, visited 1 April 2014.

38 W.A. Gullick (1916), *History of the Government Printing Office*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney.

39 R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 9; G.T. Dick, op. cit., p. 1.

40 W.A. Gullick, op. cit.

Printer in December 1840.[41] Kitchen's main tasks were to print the *Government Gazette*, as well as Bills and incidental government papers. From 1840 to 1959 the Government Printing Office occupied a site in Sydney city at the corner of Phillip and Bent streets.

More detailed versions of the nineteenth-century history of government printing in Australia have been recounted in a variety of ways by historians Richard Peck and Dennis Bryans,[42] and by the Government Printing Office itself, through its own promotional documents.[43] With the exception of the self-published study by Peck, these histories provide limited analysis. Peck's study emphasised philately and nineteenth century innovations and it is, to date, the most thorough publication on this topic. Notably, Peck called for more historical interest in the printing office's twentieth century history, which he felt was ignored. In a subsection called 'The Lost Years, 1922 – 1989', Peck explained:

> I have called this chapter 'the lost years' because, in many ways, the Government Printing Office carried on though nobody has written on its history.[44]

With the contribution of this dissertation, perhaps we need no longer consider some of these years 'lost'. My emphasis on the Gov in the second half of the twentieth century, however, is not simply because there was a scholarly gap. It is because the period from the 1960s to the 1980s was one that experienced fundamental structural changes in society, technology and political life. Added to this, a focus on this period provides the opportunity to speak to people with first-hand knowledge of this institution.

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[41] R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 9; Hilary Golder has noted that convict printers 'came cheap', and Kitchen may have had many convict printers unofficially employed and unlisted in the *Blue Book*. See H. Golder (2005), *Politics, patronage and public works: The administration of New South Wales*, vol. 1 (1842–1900), University of New South Wales Press and NSW State Records, Sydney, p. 79.

[42] R.C. Peck, op. cit.; D. Bryans (1996), 'The beginnings of type founding in Sydney: Alexander Thompson's type, his foundry and his exports to inter-colonial printers', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 75–86.

[43] V.C.N. Blight (1965), 'A look at government printing in the 1960s: The NSW Government Printer addresses Australasian Printer's graphic arts discussion group', *The Australasian Printer*, vol. XVI, no. 5, pp. 21–24; V.C.N. Blight (1969), 'New South Wales Government Printing Office', *Australian Library Journal*, August, pp. 227–28; W.A. Gullick, op. cit.; A.H. Pettifer (1957), *New Government Printing Office,* promotional publication, NSW Government Printer, Sydney; C. Potter (1890), *The Government Printing Office*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney; J.J. Spruson (1915), *History of the Government Printing Office (memos, first made on 24 July 1873)*, pamphlet, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, held with the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

[44] R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 43.

The Gov has been the topic of analysis for three dissertations. These include Barbara Cooper's 1963 study on the Gov's role as a publisher, in the field of librarianship;[45] P.F. Gross' 1967 operations research in the field of engineering,[46] and G.F. Smith's analysis of attitudes towards technological change in 1979.[47] Of these three, Smith's thesis provides the most valuable insights for the purposes of this research and, significantly, his broad interpretation of the term technology' is enriched by the work of Langdon Winner.[48]

Research into the role of governments – as publishers and keepers of information – has informed some of the historical background and contextual positioning of this study.[49] Several histories of Australian and New Zealand government printing offices (not NSW) have been written and, while these are chiefly celebratory institutional histories, they do offer some significant background 'scene setting' for the period: G. T. Dick recounts the history of the Commonwealth Government Printing Office (the early years of which are shared with its NSW counterpart);[50] Wilbur H. Glue provides a traditional institutional history of New Zealand's Government Printing Office in Wellington,[51] and D.W. Hicks' *A printers' retrospection* is a short memoir of his time employed at the Commonwealth Government Printing Office (first in Melbourne, then in Canberra).[52]

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[45] B. Cooper, op. cit.

[46] P.F. Gross (1967), 'An initial operations research to a large printing concern', Masters of Engineering thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

[47] G.F. Smith (1979), 'Attitudes towards technological change at the NSW Government Printing Office', Masters thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

[48] L. Winner (1977), *Autonomous technology: Technics-out-of-control as a theme in political thought*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

[49] J. Agar (2003), *The government machine: A revolutionary history of the computer*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London; H. Coxon (1990), 'Australian official publications: An update', *Government Publications Review*, vol. 17, pp. 213–19; O. Frankel (2006), *States of inquiry: social investigations and print culture in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore; G. Long (1957), 'Governments as publishers', *Journal of Public Administration*, June, pp. 109–14; H. Margetts (1999), *Information technology in government: Britain and America*, Routledge, London and New York; L.C. Merritt (1943), *The United States Government as publisher*, authorised facsimile (1968) by University Microfilms, Ann Arbour, Michigan, the University of Chicago, Chicago; R. Salmond, (1995), *Government printing in New Zealand 1840–1843*, Elibank Press, Wellington; G. Tillotson (1982), 'Government Gazettes in Australia: Notes on their history and role', *Government Publications Review*, vol. 9, pp. 407–15; J.C. Trewin & E.M. King (1952), *Printer to the House: The story of Hansard*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London.

[50] G.T. Dick, *Printed by authority*; see also G.T. Dick (1977), *Government printing: A select bibliography*, compiled by during research for *Printed by authority*, held at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

[51] W.A. Glue (1966), *History of the Government Printing Office*, Government Printer, New Zealand, Wellington.

[52] D.W. Hicks (1941), *A printer's retrospection: Being a memoir of the first forty years of federation*, Commonwealth Government Printing Office, Melbourne.

The relevance of material culture in the study of a printing house

As noted in the Preface, my focus on material culture has emerged out of my earlier research background in design history. For the purposes of this particular study, the source materials (images, oral testimony and archives) led the research towards the social, associative and embodied aspects of material culture. It pointed to the active and influential role of tangible things in labour contexts. The use of the term 'material culture' includes technologies, physical systems and spaces – it does not solely refer to autonomous objects. Sociologist and material culture theorist Phillip Vannini provides a useful description of the interconnectedness of studies of material culture and technology and, crucially, linked this to action – to the things that people and things *do:*

> … to study material culture is to study the technological underpinnings of culture, and to study technology is to study the material character of everyday life and its processes of objectification. What is central to such a view is an understanding of sociality and culture as a form of *making, doing* and *acting*, and an understanding of the world as material presences apprehended by humans through pragmatic, sensuous intentionality.[53]

Vannini sees culture as 'deeply shaped by techne – that is, craft, skills, creativity' and, on the flipside, he sees social life as deeply imbued with material properties.[54] This interlinked consideration of technology and material culture fits the Gov very well. The Gov lends itself well to the methodological combination employed in *Precarious Printers* because it is a story that hinges on design tradition, materiality and technology as mobilising forces for change. Social and technical worlds are mutually constitutive and the associations attached to things are always in flux. The role that printing machinery, factory spaces, computers, printed products, tools, texts and bytes played in this context means that to understand the end of traditional printing (and the end of a government-controlled printing operation), a consideration of material culture, technology and space is crucial.

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[53] P. Vannini (ed.) (2009), *Material culture and technology in everyday life*, Peter Lang, New York, Washington D.C. and Bern, p. 3. His italics.

[54] ibid.

The Gov was both everywhere and nowhere in particular in the lives of NSW citizens. The materials that it produced were generally quite ordinary, black-and-white and frequently quite text-heavy. The sheer diversity and ubiquity of the Gov's production was something that touched everyone, regardless of how little they were aware of it, as is explained in this 1959 *Sydney Morning Herald* article with the headline, 'Service for citizens' lifetime':

> The Government Printing Office is with every citizen from the cradle to the grave. It prints his birth certificate, his marriage licence, the form registering and certifying his death. For every bus and tram ride, he is given a Government printed ticket. Many of his text books he reads in his Public schools, the exercise books he uses and his examination papers are Government Printing Office products; if he bets with a bookmaker on a racecourse his ticket has the Government Printing Office imprint; so has his car licence, the 'ticket' he gets from a 'Brown Bomber', his summons to court, the order committing him to prison if he refuses to pay a fine. A permit for a grazier to move sheep comes from the Government Printing Office; the award under which an employer pays his staff comes from the Government Printing Office; and his lottery tickets, and the bus, tram and train timetables he consults.[55]

Significantly, each of these milestones was represented *physically* – in printed matter generated by the Government Printing Office. In this respect, the Gov was the producer of designed goods that ratified and confirmed a person's social status. Not only did it enable the state to govern, and provide material evidence of its capacity to govern, it also provided the tangible provisions that allowed people to be affirmed as citizens.

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[55] 'Service for citizen's lifetime' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26. Original caps retained.

Primary sources: oral history, photographs, archives

Fig. 3 **Bus tickets printed at the NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney.** Courtesy of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

Design historian Glenn Adamson has noted that 'one of the key problems in the study of material culture is the phenomenon of loss'.[56] Although the old NSW Government Printing Office building still stands in Harris Street, Ultimo, little remains of its interior or its contents, so in many ways it is an absent space.[57] The building now houses a computer data-storage centre. Only a small number of artefacts from the twentieth century days of this institution are in public collections. Sydney's Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (formerly the Powerhouse Museum) holds a number of printing presses, typesetting machines and printing samples (such as bus tickets), but the emphasis of this collection is on the nineteenth century, not the Gov's more recent history. Consequently, I do not have direct access to the larger material artefacts that would have existed within the Gov between 1959 and 1989. In any case, the lack of a thorough repository of technologies at the Gov is not necessarily an historical problem, as it is not my intention to provide a taxonomic history of technological change at the Gov. Such an approach

[56] G. Adamson (2009), 'The case of the missing footstool: Reading the absent object', in K. Harvey (ed.), *History and material culture*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 192.

[57] The loss of material and architectural remnants of twentieth century Australian industry is discussed in nuanced ways, in relation to the Sunshine Harvester Works, in C. Fahey, J. Lack & L. Dale-Hallett, op. cit.

would tell us little of the social and labour impacts in the workplace. Instead, my sources for this research have been oral histories, archives, photographic collections, newspaper articles and ephemera (leaflets, staff publications, advertisements, illustrations, etc.).[58]

As will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two, oral history is employed to access individual and collective ways of talking about working life, and to explore the workplace folklore that existed at the Gov. Interview participants' recollections are handled with care and discretion and interpreted in relation to the existing body of knowledge about the complex and relative nature of oral history material. We cannot know precisely what former employees feel or think and we cannot treat oral history as a verifiable source of 'facts'. Nonetheless, oral history can be used as a means to understand how former employees construct narratives about themselves and their workplace. Rather than providing information about the Gov's operational conditions or official production, oral sources paint a complex picture of embodied experience, community life and the social and creative aspects of working life.[59] It also shows us how workers' experiences rarely fit neatly into pre-existing historical frameworks.

Oral evidence is used in tandem with more traditional forms of historical sources, such as government archives and related published materials and ephemera.[60] Another major source is the extensive photographic collection of the NSW Government Printing Office (now held at the State Library of New South Wales), which includes thousands of images of employees, working spaces, and technologies, inside the Gov. As with the oral history content, the complexities of dealing with an archival photographic collection are considered in more detail in the following chapter.

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[58] In 1989 and 1990 the NSW Government held two auctions to sell the equipment, office supplies, machinery, and furniture from the NSW Government Printing Office. Archival records of the auctions can be found at NSW State Records, GPO General Correspondence Files #18/2112 to #18/2115, including registers of *every single object* up for auction. The auction is discussed in the Conclusion.

[59] L. Taksa, 'Machines and ghosts', p. 79.

[60] NSW State Records holds the papers of the NSW Government Printing Office, however many of the boxes are 'unlisted', which makes finding specific documentation difficult, and the researcher's task is more like 'going fishing'. I focused on files such as GSI Administrative Files and GPO General Correspondence Files, #18/1128–18/2048.

Fig. 4 **NSW Government Printing Office, 1874**, Phillip and Bent streets, Sydney. The building was modified a number of times, and eventually demolished to make way for the State Office Block. The site now houses Aurora Place, designed by Renzo Piano. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. SPF / 299.

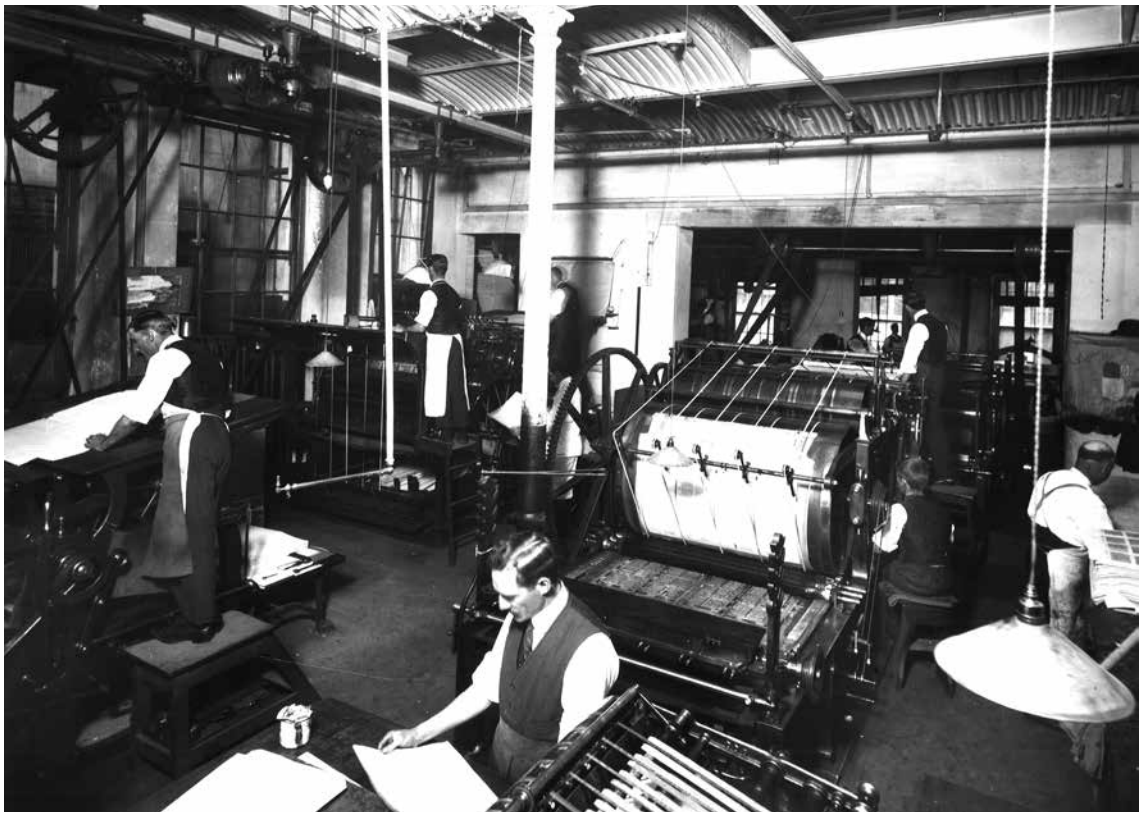

Fig. 5 **NSW Government Printing Office pressroom, showing Whitefriars Machine, 1907,** Phillip and Bent streets, Sydney. This photograph was reproduced on a large wall in the foyer of the Government Printing Office in 1986, serving as a nod to the Gov's letterpress traditions: a reminder of the types of technology that the Gov had only recently phased out. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 10940. With thanks to Richard Peck for the print.

Theorising labour for state government workers

> 'Happy in the service?'
> That was a common thing when you're walkin' past someone,
> you'd just say, 'Are ya happy in the service?' Y'know? <laughs>[61]

The use of the term 'working life' evidently recalls Marxist historical positions and the broad concept of a 'people's history'.[62] While I make use of Marxist historians and sociologists to assist my analysis, the Gov is not a straightforward example of factory workers being exploited by a capitalist boss. Being a public service institution complicates the matter, and even calling the Gov a 'factory' oversimplifies the situation. While it was a firmly hierarchical establishment – with overseers, sub-overseers and leading hands – the Gov was both a factory and an administrative office, a government service department. It was both an instrument for producing power (though the printing of laws and government material) and at the mercy of everyday party politics.

For the most part, the Gov was not designed to generate 'productive labour' (that is, labour that produces surplus value).[63] Most of the products it manufactured were not sold for a profit. Instead, the Gov's products were seen as necessary to facilitate the effective running of government, that is, the production of authority.[64] Oral history evidence suggests that there existed a widespread belief that the Gov's workers laboured in the interest of the 'public good'. This is not to say that some workers did not resent being paid comparatively low wages, nor resist the rigidly hierarchical employment structure and strict enforcement of rules by supervisors. Resentment of tough bosses was part of the workplace folklore at the Gov, as with

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[61] Phillip Rhoden, interview with author, 27 February 2013.

[62] R. Samuel (ed.) (1981), *People's history and socialist theory*, Routledge, London.

[63] M.C. Howard & J.E. King (1975), *The political economy of Marx*, Longman, Harlow, pp. 128–31.

[64] This statement applies to the Government Printing Office until the late 1970s. By the 1980s the political language of 'corporate management' had filtered into the government sector and the Gov, among other government agencies, was being asked to prove its efficiency and profitability. See also M. Considine (1988), 'The corporate management framework as administrative science: A critique', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XLVII, no. 1, pp. 4–18; B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 232.

many other industrial establishments in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia.[65] But being an employee of the Gov was also, to some extent, about being a good citizen, about working in the *service* of the state.

What the Gov produced was not merely physical and material; the institution was a container and producer of official *information*. For example, the basement of the Gov contained the entire electoral roll, frame upon frame, in typeset metal formes. The roll was stored in countless racks and formes and pages were identified and amended by compositors, line by line, when a citizen made a correction to his or her enrolment (or enrolled, or died).[66] Large metal formes and leather-bound law books gave government information emphatic physical expression (which today we sense only in relic form). The weightiness of letterpress had an implicit authority to it. These heavy lines of text were government work, at a time when governance was tangible, and power was expressed through printed material. During this period, new legislation was not ratified until it appeared, printed, in the *NSW Government Gazette*. In other words, law was not law until it was printed.[67] This meant that, through industrial action, printers had the ability to suspend the process of governance. Lifting a heavy forme filled with composed metal type, compositors or press-machinists were not simply performing an industrial task, they were literally taking the law into their own hands. The level of technological and tangible authority – and the perceived masculinity attached to it – proved to be deeply embedded at the Gov.

A Marxist position helps remind us that dominant ideologies are reproduced through all institutions, whether they belong to the public or private sector. The fact that this individual organisation, the Gov, did not always yield productive labour does not place it outside the system. In this sense we can see the state itself as an authoritative commodity that the Gov's workers were engaged in producing.[68] The Gov manufactured documents that helped reproduce the dominant social and economic relations of society, bus and train tickets, government

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[65] J. Shields, *All our labours*, pp. 5–6.

[66] See Chapter Nine for details on how compositors played games with electoral roll content.

[67] 'Paper tigers' (1989), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June, p. 26.

[68] M. Burawoy (2012), 'The roots of domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci', *Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 2, p. 198.

reports, police reports, school textbooks, Lotto tickets and so forth. Ultimately, the Gov itself was swallowed up by ever-expanding capital; with the closure of the Gov in 1989, almost all government printing jobs were redirected to the commercial sector.[69] By contrast to a Marxist interpretation, an economic rationalist or neo-liberal reading of the Gov may focus on how the institution was (allegedly) inefficient and unprofitable, that its closure was 'inevitable' and that workers were better off retraining in new technologies and working in the private sector.[70]

Neither position gives us the full picture. Human experience is rarely captured well by an over-arching historical narrative. As Shields reminds us, workers do not generally recount their experience in distanced, analytical terms. Shields states:

> It is a rare interviewee indeed who speaks abstractly of 'capitalism', 'wage labour' and the 'labour process' … rather, narratives are almost always constructed around the remembered qualities of the individuals who actually inhabited the workplace.[71]

While interviewees may not articulate power relations in those terms, we can still glean much information from the ways in which particular workplace experiences are recounted. It allows us to see how the narratives of working life are constructed, treating the account of working life as a display of a particular perspective.[72] Interviewees construct accounts about their own identities and relationship to their former workplace and these accounts are intertwined with considerations of class, gender, technology and culturally specific concepts (such as the 'breadwinner' notion, and the idea that they must 'improve themselves' through life).

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[69] B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 233.

[70] See the arguments put forth in the consultancy review of the NSW Government Printing Office: Australian Consulting Partners (1989), *Strategy review of the New South Wales Government Printing Office: Achieving efficient printing through appropriate technology and decentralisation*, for the NSW Government Sydney; and Australian Consulting Partners (1989), *A post-implementation review of the Government Printing Office closure*, for the New South Wales Government, Sydney.

[71] J. Shields, *All our labours*, p. 2.

[72] ibid., p. 3; D. Silverman (2001), *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text, and interaction*, 2nd edn, Sage Publications, London, p. 112.

Changes in values and politics, 1959–1989

Fig. 6 **The new Government Printing Office building, under construction, 1957,** Harris Street, Ultimo, looking south. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 08781.

As stated at the outset, this three-decade period represents the years that the Gov operated from the inner city industrial suburb of Ultimo in Sydney. It was to here that between 1958 and 1959 most sections of the Government Printing Office shifted from crowded and inadequate buildings at Phillip and Bent streets [Figs 4–5] into the modern amenity of a new, purpose-built printing factory in Harris Street. [Fig. 6] The workers' spatial and architectural memories of the new building are explored in Chapter Three, which also provides a brief architectural history of the Government Printing Office buildings.

When it opened in 1959, the new Government Printing Office was a refreshingly modern workplace; spacious, organised and apparently rationally planned. It was celebrated at its

opening as a magnificent 'monument to literacy and democracy' in Australia.[73] During the 1950s and early 1960s, the Gov was generally held in high esteem by the state government and by the public (to the extent that they were aware of it).[74] It offered quality apprentice training and in this sense the Gov was not merely an employer, it was also an industrial training institution, taking on apprentices for six-year periods. In the 1960s, at a time of full employment, many of the Gov's employees imagined that they had lifelong job security and, for some, the Gov was deeply ingrained in their identity, both as skilled craftspeople and as public servants.

Victor Charles Nathaniel Blight (known as VCN Blight) was the NSW Government Printer from 1958 to 1973. [Fig. 7] His leadership style was emphatically authoritarian and set the tone for the hierarchical management style in place at the Gov. Supervisors were called 'overseers', and they literally oversaw their staff from elevated platforms on the factory floor. [Fig. 42] Blight had the Queen's insignia on the front of his Rolls Royce and a full-time driver. (Some staff joked that VCN Blight's initials stood for 'Vicious Callous Nasty Bastard'.) The Masons held an influential sway in NSW public sector employment in the middle of the twentieth century and Blight was the Grand Master and Leader of the Masonic Lodge (Lakemba), as well as being a lay Methodist minister.[75] At the Gov (as with much of the rest of the NSW Public Service in this period) there was a broad social understanding that Masonic membership was crucial for those looking for promotion.[76] The strength of the Masons at the Gov began to wane in the 1970s, particularly with the retirement of VCN Blight and the appointment of Government Printer Don West, a West Australian printing manager who had worked in newspapers and was unaffiliated with the Freemasons. [Fig. 7]

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[73] J. J. Cahill, Premier and Colonial Treasurer of New South Wales, speech at the opening of the new building for the NSW Government Printing Office, 23 February 1959, Sydney. Speech transcript published in (1959) *Government Printing Office Staff Journal* 12, no. 1, Sydney.

[74] 'Premier opens printing office' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 11; 'Office is 118 years old' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 27; 'Service for citizen's lifetime' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26.

[75] 'High honour for local man' (1973), *The Campsie News and Lakemba Advance*, 10 January, p. 1.

[76] The majority of my interview participants asserted a view similar to this. For contextual clarification on the role of Freemason Societies in Britain and Australia, see: D. Weinbren & B. James (2005), 'Getting a grip: the role of friendly societies in Australia and Britain reappraised', *Labour History*, vol. 88, pp. 87–103.

Fig. 7 **Bill Bright, Don West, Victor Charles Nathaniel Blight, Sid Hampson and Fred Layt, 1973,** assembled for VCN Blight's retirement. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 22215.

With the election of NSW Labor Premier Neville Wran in 1976, the machinery of government in NSW was gradually reformed. Although Wran publicly distanced himself from (by then former) Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's agenda, like Whitlam he instituted significant reform in the public service. With the appointments of Peter Wilenski and Gerry Gleeson, the NSW public service was examined in detail.[77] As described by historian Beverley Kingston, prior to the Wran reforms the public service had 'management systems devised in an ad hoc fashion', as well as 'cases of wasteful demarcation, duplication and outright obstructionism'.[78] The reforms included progressive policies such as equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, as well as greater accountability in the public service. The Public Service Board worked to rid the NSW Public Service of corruption and remove divisions between Catholics,

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[77] B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 208. Gerry Gleeson was Secretary of the Premiers' Department. Peter Wilenski, former Private Secretary to Gough Whitlam, was commissioned to undertake an Interim Report on NSW Public Administration. The result was P. Wilenski (1977), *Directions for change: Review of New South Wales government administration – interim report*, NSW Government Printer, Sydney.

[78] ibid.

Protestants and Masons, by introducing more stringent performance criteria and other equity reforms. Such reforms were oftentimes experienced as positive transformations of a large, run-down and at times chaotic public service.[79]

The 1970s and 1980s reforms of the NSW Public Service were at the same time part of a broader political and economic realignment. The economic rationalist policies of the United Kingdom and the United States increasingly influenced Australian politics and economic management. This is widely acknowledged as a federal pattern, exemplified by Paul Keating's economic policies of deregulation and economic rationalism during his role as Treasurer in the Hawke government).[80] In fact, the state of NSW predated Keating's rationalist policies; Premier Wran's leadership featured a drive to reform the public service in a 'corporate management' style.[81] Stage agencies and departments were increasingly required to measure their outputs in terms of economic efficiency and in many cases State ministers began to demand that their 'enterprises' show a profit.[82] This meant that some public service departments were pressured to put more emphasis on outcomes that were financially measurable, and less focus on effectiveness or achievement on non-economic grounds. Fiscal targets, efficiency audits and 'performance indicators' became the style of the time.[83] Social values and attitudes held less sway in decision-making than issues of efficiency and profit.[84] This contrasted with an older, bureaucratic attitude towards public institutions, which focussed on rules, regulations and a rationalist concept of legalistic order.[85] As Kingston has observed, by the time Nick Greiner was elected as NSW Liberal Premier in 1988, the economic rationalist ideals on which he campaigned were already embedded within the management of the NSW Public Service.[86]

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79 B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 208.

80 A. Yeatman (1987), 'The concept of public management and the Australian state in the 1980s', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XLVI, no. 4,pp. 339–56.

81 ibid.; M. Considine, op. cit.

82 D.H. Borchardt (1982), 'Has the AGS a future? Some comments on current problems', *Government Publications Review*, vol. 9, pp. 391–99; M. Grealy (1988), ' "Shape up" warning to State chiefs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October, p. 40.

83 M. Considine op. cit., p. 5; A. Yeatman, op. cit.

84 L. Bryson (1987), 'Women and management in the public sector', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XLVI, no. 3, p. 262.

85 M. Considine, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

86 B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 209.

Beset by negative predictions for the health of the NSW economy, the new state Liberal government under Nick Greiner became increasingly interested in raising revenue by the sale of government institutions: power stations, coal mines, railway infrastructure, brickworks and printing offices.[87] No longer was there a faith that centralised, government-controlled departments ensured efficiency, security and order. The unregulated commercial market was seen as the solution.[88] Thus we can see that this historical period at the Gov – from 1959 to 1989 – is representative of a broader political shift in Australia; a move away from traditional manufacturing economy with craft-based collective identities and practices towards individualised attitudes and a neo-liberal service economy.

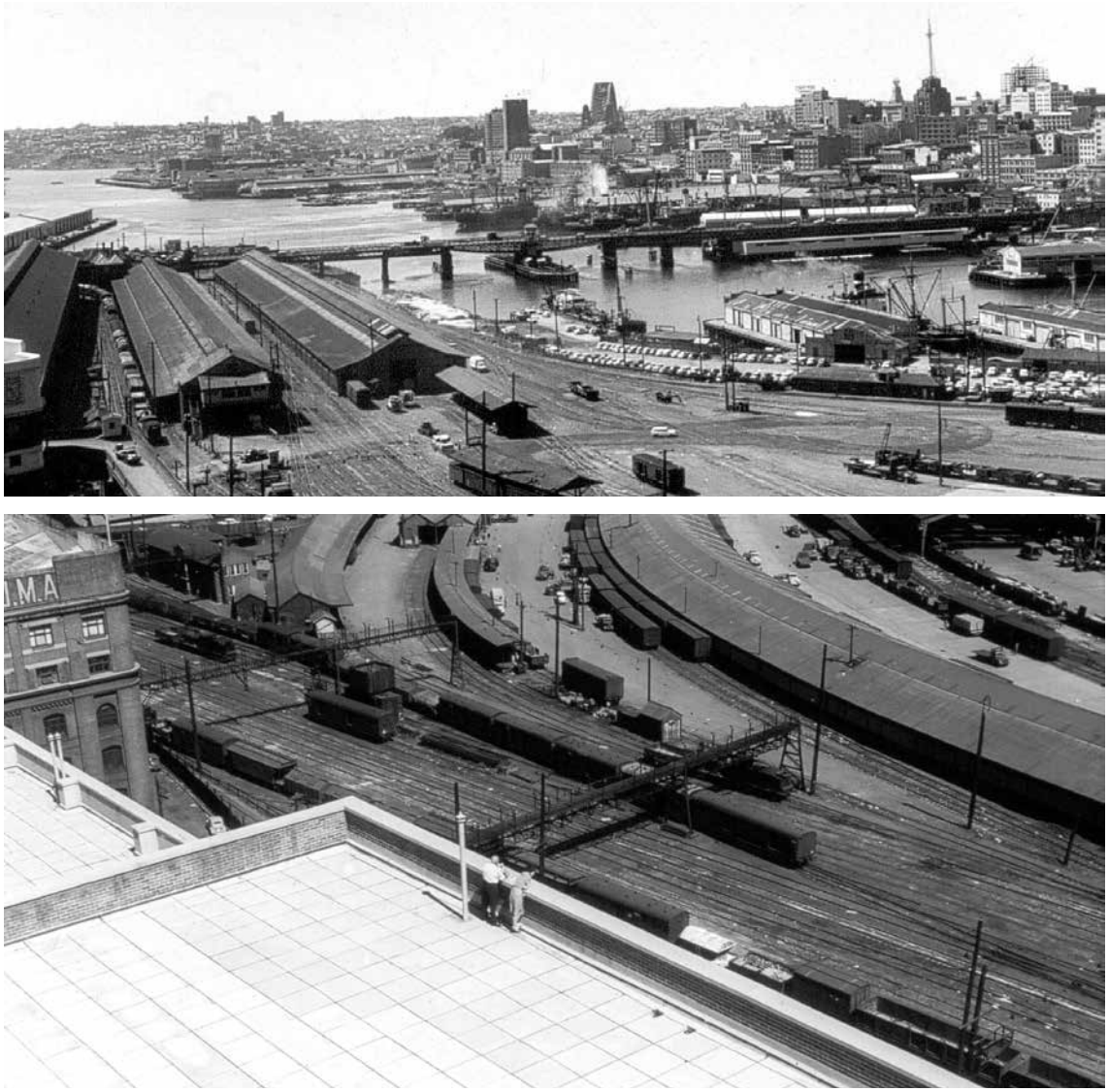
Fig. 8 **The end of the Darling Harbour Goods Yard, 1984.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 19559.

Between the 1970s and 1980s the city of Sydney also changed shape dramatically – from a former manufacturing and industrial city with a working harbour into an ambitious and brash metropolitan hub and a glittering recreational harbour, with aspirations of becoming a global city and a centre of culture, banking, sport, tourism and technology. As they gazed out down

87 L. Colley, 'How secure was that public service job?'.

88 See for example, R. Gittins (1992), 'Farewell to the State's best economic manager', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June, p. 18.

from their factory building in Ultimo at the transformation of Darling Harbour, the Gov's employees literally witnessed this transition in the urban fabric of Sydney.[89] In many ways, as the demolition and redevelopment of Darling Harbour unfolded before them, it was as if they were witnessing their own decline and precarious status.



Figs 9–10 **Two views from the lift overrun at the top of the NSW Government Printing Office building,** down to the flat part of the roof and the Darling Harbour Railway Goods Yard, c. 1960s. Photographs by John Cusack, reproduced with permission.

[89] I would like to acknowledge the Cadigal people of the Eora nation as the traditional owners of the land around Darling Harbour and Ultimo. The Cadigal people called Darling Harbour 'Tumbalong', which may mean: 'the place where sea food is found'. The area now known as Cockle Bay was given its name due to the shell middens left by Cadigal people. European settlers used the shell middens to produce shell-lime, which was a building material used in the mortar of Sydney's early stone buildings. S. Upton (n.d.), *Through the lens: Darling Harbour: Snapshots of government architecture*, NSW State Records, viewed 20 November 2013, http://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au/index.php/galleries/through-the-lens-darling-harbour.

Darling Harbour exemplifies this move from a protected, manufacturing city into a globalised service city. The Gov's east-facing facade looked directly out onto Darling Harbour and beyond that, onto Sydney's Central Business District (CBD). In 1853 the Sydney Railway Company had obtained three hectares of land from the Harris Estate to build a rail terminus and goods yard. The Darling Harbour Goods Yard was the terminus of the Metropolitan Goods Railway Line, which opened in 1855. The deep-water anchorage available at Pyrmont made the area attractive for the construction of wharves, and Sydney's food markets were located nearby (in what is now known as Haymarket). The wharves and railway were a major influence on the development of Pyrmont and Ultimo as industrial suburbs, prompting the development of woolstores, wharves, factories, a sugar refinery and power plants.

The Darling Harbour Goods Yard operated until October 1984. In oral history interviews, some of the Gov's former employees spoke of watching the trains (and of the air pollution they generated). From those east-facing windows, the Gov's workers progressively watched the demolition of the Goods Yard, the construction of the flyover of the City West Link roadways and, below it, the transformation of Darling Harbour. From the mid-1980s to the Bicentennial in 1988, Darling Harbour was rebuilt as a tourist harbour, with spaces designated for shopping, hotels, an exhibition and convention centre, parks and public promenades. The Sydney Aquarium and the Australian National Maritime Museum were constructed and the Monorail made a ring around the western side of the harbour into the CBD. Although Darling Harbour is now frequently lambasted as a poor example of postmodern architecture and urban design,[90] at the time its revitalisation was strikingly visible evidence of the rebirth of Sydney as a global service city.[91]

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[90] In 2013 the architectural and urban design of Darling Harbour was again in the spotlight, with arguments both for and against the new development plan, and concerns about the demolition of several buildings on the western side, including the Convention Centre by Philip Cox. See media reports: L. McKenny (2013), 'Architects dismiss Darling Harbour revamp', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July, http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/architects-dismiss-darling-harbour-revamp-20130709-2pofd.html; J. Gorman (2013), 'Sydney architect calls for preservation of award-winning Darling Harbour buildings', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 February, http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/city-east/architect-plans-to-save-centre/story-fngr8h22-1226578019274; J. Tovey & J. Saulwick (2011), 'Darling Harbour: Challenge is on', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September, http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/darling-harbour-challenge-is-on-20110929-1kzdn.html#ixzz1ZNywCYE1; J.A. Stein (2012), 'Links to the right paths take the city forwards', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/links-to-the-right-paths-take-the-city-forwards-20121216-2bhfw.html.

[91] B. Kingston, op. cit., pp. 214–15.

Fig. 11 **Demolition and rebuilding of Darling Harbour with the Government Printing Office in the background (right), 1985.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 36990.

Fig. 12 **View south-west to the rear side of the NSW Government Printing Office, Ultimo, early 1980s,** showing the Eastern Distributor under construction in Darling Harbour. Courtesy the City of Sydney Archives, Sydney Reference Collection. File #039/039781, citation SRC13384. Reproduced with permission.

The 1980s produced a situation where new technologies and labour processes (as well as government policy) led to the creation of different divisions of labour, breaking down old divisions and, in some cases, producing new ones. Gender was one category that was at stake in the reconfiguration of the Gov's divisions of labour. The complex, shifting gender regime of the Gov was always present in the way in which machines, job roles and spaces were interpreted, navigated and transformed.[92] It is important to acknowledge that the gender regime at the Gov was not dictated simply by past tradition. As Raewyn Connell points out, the relations between gender and labour in the workplace are always active and evolving, not static: 'New divisions, accommodations, and interpretations and constantly being produced."[93] Connell reminds us that 'gender is a dynamic system, not a fixed dichotomy; the categories themselves are not simple or stable (contrary to common sense)'.[94] The same applies to the way in which particular technologies and objects can become gendered at particular points in time; these associations are continually changing and being renegotiated. In some cases, new technologies are appropriated by those in power so as to replicate older divisions of labour.[95] In other cases, new technologies represent a rupture in the dominant gender regime of a particular worksite.[96]

The issue of gender is present in a number of chapters. Chapter Four, on press-machinists, interprets the impact of technological change in relation to issues of craft masculinity. As noted previously, Chapters Seven and Eight return to the issue of gender, this time considering the experiences of women at the Gov, where they were traditionally in the minority, but whose numbers grew significantly between the 1960s and 1980s.

In the second-half of the twentieth century, the Gov was a printing house that was still steeped in the traditions, processes and prejudices inherited from the nineteenth and early-twentieth century printing houses. Yet from the early 1970s, this NSW public service

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92 R.W. Connell, 'Glass ceilings or gendered institutions?', pp. 837–49.

93 ibid., p. 841.

94 ibid., p. 838.

95 As described in A. Baron (1989), 'Questions of gender: Deskilling and demasculinization in the US printing industry 1830–1915', *Gender & History*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 178–99; Baron, 'An "other" side of gender antagonism at work', pp. 47–69.

96 As described in C. Cockburn, *Brothers*.

department began to embrace progressive concepts such as equal employment opportunity (even before the law obliged it to do so) and it encouraged the retraining of tradespeople in emerging technologies. Women – for so long maligned and forbidden entry by unions into the patriarchal world of skilled printing trades[97] – were increasingly encouraged to undertake non-traditional apprenticeships.[98] From the late 1970s, women were able to enter apprenticeships in bookbinding, compositing, press-operation and graphic reproduction, and their numbers gradually increased at the Gov.[99] Nonetheless, continuing gender prejudice meant that women in the printing industry faced considerable opposition to their very presence.[100] These women were not passive victims of discrimination; they came up with strategic and creative ways of managing their situations and their tactics included the re-making of particular spaces and zones and the attainment of thorough embodied knowledge of machinery.

It took 30 years for the Gov to transform from a conservative, nineteenth-century-style printing house – steeped in masculinist craft traditions – into a government service office attempting to introduce 'cutting-edge' computerised typesetting technologies, and increasingly using a 'corporate management' style of organisational reform.[101] By the late 1980s the Gov had introduced computers and high-speed offset-lithography into its set of work practices and it appeared to be 'catching up' with the rest of the printing industry. Its critics claimed the Gov was unable to keep to deadlines and that it was unprofitable (even though, as an organisation, it was designed to privilege access to information over profit).[102] As a government service department, it was originally intended to be thorough and painstaking in its production of government material, not swift, ruthless and profit-driven. Yet the

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97 R. Frances, *The politics of work*.

98 R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones (1993), *Women in printing: Employers' attitudes to women in trades*, Women's Bureau, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

99 ibid.; R. Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language', pp. 89–106.

100 M. Braundy (2011), *Men, women and tools: Bridging the divide*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax & Winnipeg; R. Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language'; J. Wajcman, 'The feminisation of work', pp. 459–74.

101 M. Considine, op. cit., pp. 4–18; B. Kingston, op. cit., p. 232.

102 O. Frankel, op. cit., pp. 39–46; D. Hartridge (1982), 'State government printing offices in Australia today', *Government Publications Review*, vol. 9, pp. 373–89; 'Too many late reports' (1987), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June, p. 1; 'Writing's on the wall' (1989), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 August, p. 31.

Greiner Government's reasons for its closure were given on purely economic grounds, with an emphasis on the institution's inability to make a profit.[103] Following a swift decision, the Gov was closed in mid-1989 and the employees were given only four weeks' notice. The conclusion of this dissertation provides more details about the closure.

Ultimately *Precarious Printers* considers the way in which male and female workers – from a variety of class and trade backgrounds – responded to the dramatic social, political and technological changes that occurred both in the NSW public service and broadly in the printing industry between the 1960s and the 1980s. How did people – collectively and individually – resist, tolerate, endure and embrace the transformations of their working lives? *Precarious Printers* provides a set of narratives about how the Gov's employees built strategic alliances and participated in unofficial creative practices. Both methods were strategic (and sometimes unconscious) responses to their increasingly precarious and swiftly changing situation. In this way, this dissertation is about how people wrestle for small fragments of autonomy and security in a world over which they have little or no control. These chapters also combine to show a method whereby oral history, material culture and stories of labour and working life can be productively brought together in the telling of an industrial history.

[103] Australian Consulting Partners (1989), *Strategy review of the New South Wales Government Printing Office: Achieving efficient printing through appropriate technology and decentralisation*, for the New South Wales Government Sydney.

PART I

IMAGE, SPACE, VOICE

2. Oral history & institutional photographs: methodological reflections*

Fig. 13 **Preparations for the Government Printing Office to host the NSW State Election Tally Room, 17 November 1973.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 21992.

* A part of this chapter has been published in J.A. Stein (2013), ' "That was a posed photo": Reflections on the process of combining oral histories with institutional photographs', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, vol. 35, pp. 49–57.

Introduction

This chapter explores the complex interplay of meaning that emerges when using both oral histories and institutional photographs, in the interview itself and in the stages of interpretation. It also introduces the process undertaken for the *NSW Government Printing Office Oral History Project*. The first section provides a methodological explanation of my oral history practice in relation to existing critical discourse on oral history. The chapter then explores the relationship between institutional photographs and oral history.

Throughout the research process used for this project, archival photographs were used in close relationship with oral histories. While institutional photographs do not show the 'reality' of workplace practices, such images can reveal some of the ways that this institution sought to represent itself officially and its continued presence in memory and historical narrative. The use of institutional photographs during the oral history interview can provide insights into the disjuncture between bureaucratic representations of an organisation and former employees' recollections of working life. Oral history interviews indicate that these former employees possessed a confident and playful awareness of the 'grey area' between institutional representation and everyday practice and that they performed an active role in the shaping of some of those situations. This chapter engages with oral history literature, particularly in relation to the links between oral testimony and photographs. It also opens up the field to include the use of institutional photographs in the interview process, rather than personal or family images, which has often been the focus of previous research in this area.[1]

The relationship between oral history and photography is a relatively new but growing area in oral history literature.[2] While recent scholarship in this field has tended to focus on personal and family photographs,[3] this study uses photographs from an institutional archive, namely, that

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[1] A. Freund & A. Thomson (2011), 'Introduction', in A. Freund & A. Thomson (eds), *Oral history and photography*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 7.

[2] ibid., p. 1.

[3] Freund and Thomson note that this emphasis on family and personal photographs in oral history practice 'is intrinsic to current oral history practice'. ibid., p. 7.

of the NSW Government Printing Office.[4] In the context of family photographic collections, the photographic record often belongs to those who are depicted; it was often generated by them or by other family members. As physical objects and images, these photographs are often invested with strong attachments and associations, already tightly bound to memory, and implicated in how individuals make meaning in their lives.[5] The introduction into the oral history interview of workplace photographs produced by an institutional employer produces an entirely different scenario.

This is a meaningful shift; many of these photographs are not personally owned by the people being interviewed, yet the images may still record important aspects of these participants' lives. With institutional photographs, the questions of 'what?', 'how?' and 'in whose interest?' are sometimes difficult to answer, although it is usually possible to say that photographs depicting workplace scenes were produced in a manner that was officially endorsed. Such images were taken and distributed with the aim of representing the institution in a positive light, to relay an appropriate image of this organisation to the public. The images are de-personalised; they are not usually produced with the aim of recording someone or something 'special', but with the aim of recording and distributing normative, best-practice images of idealised labour.

Given that many of these photographs were taken in the service of a government institution, the collection has a certain bureaucratic quality. American writer and theorist Susan Sontag raised concerns about the bureaucratic classification produced by the photographic medium.[6] She warned how, through institutional photographs, 'the world becomes a series of unrelated, freestanding particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *faits divers*'.[7] This could risk an historical view that trivialises and fetishises isolated photographic images, rather than understanding their deep interconnectedness with social and historical contexts.[8]

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[4] These images are supplemented by photographs and ephemera generously provided by former employees of the Gov.

[5] Although, as Alexander Freund and Angela Thiessen have noted, getting participants to respond to family photographs is not a straightforward matter either. See A. Freund & A. Thiessen (2011), 'Mary Brockmeyer's wedding picture: Exploring the intersection of photographs and oral history interviews', in *Oral history and photography*, pp. 30–31.

[6] S. Sontag (1979 [1973]), *On photography*, Penguin Books, London & New York, p. 156.

[7] ibid., p. 21.

[8] ibid., p. 23.

That is why the photographs from the Gov cannot easily stand alone; however, when they are juxtaposed with verbal accounts (among other sources), we have some hope of stitching things back together in a variety of ways, providing the connections that can be lost when an image is isolated from its context.

What happens, then, when an institutional photographic collection is re-introduced into a contemporary context, into an oral history interview?[9] In this case specifically, what happens when these photographs are presented to former employees of the Gov? These are the people who are best equipped to 'read' these institutional images and tell a richer and perhaps more complex story about the layers of workplace history and institutional representation. Nonetheless, their testimony may not operate in predictable or straightforward ways. Interview participants' testimony should not be used simply to 'decode' or explain the photographic content; what they say can potentially tell us far more. Of course, the use of institutional photographs in the oral history process does not demonstrate workplace practices 'as they were' in a documentary sense, but it can reveal some of the ways that this institution sought to represent itself and how employees responded to those attempts by the institution to present particular narratives. The examples provided at the end of this chapter indicate that these former employees were (and still are) shrewd, active and sometimes mischievous contributors to the production of the Gov's public 'image'.

To each interview I brought along a variety of sample photographs selected from the State Library of New South Wales' (SLNSW) Government Printing Office photographic collection. The assortment of photographs differed slightly with each interview, because the selection of images was enriched over time with further catalogue discoveries as the research progressed. This selection was broadly representative of the main sections at the Gov (bookbinding, press-machining, composition, document reproduction, management) and

[9] With the photographs from the Gov, however, participants were sometimes unfamiliar with the images (or had not seen them for many years) and many were pleasantly surprised by the experience of seeing so many photographs of their former workplace gathered together. Printed and digital copies of particular photographs were shared with interview participants, when requested.

I included images of spaces within the factory building, close-up photographs of machinery and images of leisure activities (such as netball on the roof and special events in the canteen).

In most instances, the photographs were shown to the interview participants towards the end of the interview session,[10] when most of my questions had concluded. Often, while we were consuming refreshments, the photographic browsing would begin, usually quite organically. I left the recorder on during this period, with the knowledge of the participants. Many participants began by scanning photographs for familiar faces, staying quiet until they recognised someone they knew. This sometimes meant that the end of the interview consisted of silences or observations about the images that did not yield useful quotes, such as, 'Yep, I know him … I know him … I know him too.' This process required patience. Occasionally particular photographs had the effect of sparking a conversation, reminding the participants of something they had forgotten and that I would not have known to ask about. When this happened, the conversation could start up again. In this way, some photographs operated as memory triggers.[11] But that is not what is compelling about the use of institutional images in this process.

The examples provided at the end of this chapter demonstrate a subtly different dynamic. Yes, they remind us of the unpredictable mnemonic power of photographs and how the presence of photographs in the interview process can enable different ways of talking about the past.[12] More interestingly, these examples demonstrate the awareness that participants had about how their institution sought to represent itself publicly. In response to this formal performance of institutional competency – as demonstrated in the images used in annual reports and apprentice recruitment material – the workers responded playfully, with humour, irreverence and creativity.

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[10] Judy McKinty and Margaret Tomkins had a similar but subtly different strategy when engaging in an oral history project related to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB). In their interviews, photographs were presented *before* the formal interview process, with a variety of results. J. McKinty and M. Tomkins (2012) 'From the cradle to the grave: Sister Lindsey and the blind babies' nursery', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 34, pp. 27–31.

[11] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit., p. 4; H. Slim, P. Thompson, O. Bennett & N. Cross (1998), 'Ways of listening', in R. Perks & A. Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 148–49.

[12] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

The NSW Government Printing Office Oral History Project

In August 2011 I received approval from the University of Technology Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct recorded interviews with former employees of the Government Printing Office and other relevant persons to ask them about their recollections of working life and their experience of technological change at the Gov.[13] The interviews took place in Sydney between October 2011 and July 2013 and I interviewed 31 people (25 men and six women).[14] The participants whom I interviewed were employed variously at the Gov from 1932 to 1989. Several participants had also worked at the small agency that was instituted to replace the Gov, the Government Printing Service (GPS), and at the private agencies that followed it, such as CM Solutions and Salmat, in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Interview participants worked in a wide variety of trades and professional areas: book-binding, hand and machine composition, computer typesetting and desktop publishing, letterpress and lithographic printing, dot-etching and engraving, graphic reproduction, camera operation, proof-reading, production planning, design, union organisation, transport and despatch, administration, marketing and senior management, including the NSW Government Printer from 1973 to 1989, Don West. Some participants had worked with the NSW Parliamentary Counsel's Office and in graphic arts training at Sydney Institute TAFE (formerly Sydney Technical College). At the time of interview, the youngest interview participants were aged in their mid-forties and the oldest was aged 102. [Fig. 14] Some participants had retired from full-time work, although many were still working in the printing and publishing industries and in other professions.

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[13] UTS HREC Approval Ref No. #2011–285A.

[14] I also conducted informal (unrecorded) conversations with over fifteen others who had knowledge of the NSW Government Printing Office, including former South Australian government printer, Don Woolman; current West Australian Government Printer John Strijk, and former Commonwealth Government Printer, John Thompson. I spoke at length with former PKIU leaders Gordon Cook (former NSW Secretary of the PKIU) and John Cahill (former National Secretary of the PKIU). These conversations have not been used as formal quotable sources, however the experience has undoubtedly added to my general understanding of the historical situation and the way people positioned themselves in relation to it.

Fig. 14 **Participants Ray Utick and George Larden, former press-machinists, 2012,** West Ryde. Photograph by the author.

Most interviews were undertaken in Sydney, in person, although geographical restrictions meant that seven interviews were conducted over the telephone. For some interviews I also made trips to the Central Coast and to the Lower Blue Mountains, but in a few cases travel was not possible. As might be expected, the telephone interviews had a more limited scope and tended to be shorter in duration,[15] although they still provided moments for lengthy recollections of the Gov. They provided the opportunity for participants to give their opinions about their workplace and discuss what they felt was important to them about their experience at the Gov. In short, while an in-person interview was preferable, the telephone interviews still seemed more worthwhile than undertaking no interview at all.[16]

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[15] In-person interviews ranged from 60 minutes to three hours, while telephone interviews ranged from 40 to 150 minutes.

[16] Even after the interview period had drawn to a close, I was still being contacted by former employees. In these situations I apologised for being unable to interview them formally and encouraged them to share their recollections in written form – in an email or a letter. Several people chose to share their memories in this manner.

Participants were recruited through printing industry advertisements, social media and word-of-mouth 'snowball' sampling.[17] I submitted notices to a number of newsletter and online publications related to the printing industry, such as *Print21*,[18] as well as with the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union's (AMWU) newsletter. I posted notices in a number of community centres around Sydney and at NSW State Records. The project was advertised online – through the Powerhouse Museum's blog[19] and through my own publications.[20] Many participants contacted me directly (by telephone, letter or email). Between 2011 and 2013 contact was made with more than 60 people who had worked at the Government Printing Office (or had some significant relationship to it). Given the time restraints for this doctoral project, I was not able to interview everyone I made contact with (and I was not always able to locate everyone I was told about). Nonetheless, the group I interviewed represents a broad variety of trades, workplace experiences, class backgrounds and education levels and they expressed wide-ranging opinions about working at the Gov. Their political attitudes were diverse and they held differing views about the circumstances surrounding the Gov's closure.

The interviews took place in a variety of locations, such as community centres, libraries, Returned Services League (RSL) clubs,[21] cafes, university study rooms, private homes and pubs. While oral historians' conventions once strictly stipulated that interviews ought to take

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[17] This is a process that makes use of participants' extended networks of friends and colleagues, in order to find more interview participants. Snowball sampling is a very effective way to find participants, but it can sometimes have the effect of ballooning out – where knowing a handful of participants can soon expand to countless numbers of other potential interviewees. Participants contacted former colleagues and soon I was receiving phone calls and emails from up to 60 former employees of the Gov who were interested in finding out more about the project.

[18] *Print21* describes itself as the 'The Australian and New Zealand online journal for the printing industries'. See J. Kowalewski (2011) 'Stories sought on old Government Printing Office', *Print 21*, 22 November, visited 17 January 2014, http://print21.com.au/stories-sought-on-old-government-printing-office/34705.

[19] See the Powerhouse Museum blog post here: http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/imageservices/2011/09/government-printing-office. The link was no longer active when checked on 12 December 2013.

[20] See for example this post on my blog about Ultimo, *Penultimo*: http://penultimo.tumblr.com/post/10393337114/callout; and information provided on my research blog, *Picturing the Guv*: http://nswhgovernmentprintingoffice.tumblr.com/oralhistory.

[21] RSL clubs and football clubs proved to be a popular choice for interview locations. Some interviewees preferred the guarantee of familiar public surroundings and the provision of air-conditioning, ample seating, parking and cheap refreshments. One downside of these venues for oral history interviews is noise. The repetitive (but usually distant) background noise of poker machines punctuates many of my recordings and it is more noticeable during transcription than actually during the interview. One interview was interrupted by a sudden flurry of bingo playing but we were able to find another location.

place in quiet, neutral surroundings,[22] my participants often stated a preference for locations that were not so quiet or sterile, such as pubs and clubs. This included pubs with a proximity to the old Government Printing Office building, namely, the Lord Wolseley Hotel in Ultimo. When interviewing at the Lord Wolseley, the proximity to the old Government Printing Office building just down the road gave those particular interviews a sense of connectedness that some participants seemed to warm to. Some participants enjoyed having a beer and a banter, as this social experience was, perhaps, closer to their mode of relating to others when they worked at the Gov. Those who had worked in management, on the other hand, were comfortable meeting in office-style meeting rooms, at a university, for example.

In 2011 I lived in Ultimo. Through living in this suburb and at the same time engaging with Ultimo-related historical records, I developed a detailed knowledge of the area.[23] This enabled a layered sense of knowing the place – physically and spatially, through everyday experience, through oral history and through historical records. This proved to be a valuable experience of in-situ research. Being an Ultimo local also helped me find common ground with my interviewees, who tended to know Ultimo well. This sense of local situatedness also enabled a particular process between both the interviewer and the interviewee: a co-construction of spatial memory, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

I often began the interview by asking how people found themselves in a job at the Gov (which was often a decision made with parental involvement, as many began as teenage apprentices). I asked about initial perceptions of the Gov, and about the process of learning a trade (if relevant). I asked questions about the impact of technological change on their work and on the culture of the Gov in general. Participants were asked about their perceptions of staff morale, pride in work, their opinions about workplace efficiency and their attitudes to reform in the organisation.

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[22] See for example the list of recommendations about oral history practice on Oral History Australia's website: http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices. (Formerly known as the Oral History Association of Australia.)

[23] See M. Ham (2011), 'Past master', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Higher Education Supplement, 16 April, p. 4, http://newsstore.fairfax.com.au/apps/viewDocument.ac?page=1&sy=nstore&kw=jesse+adams+stein&pb=all_ffx&dt=selectRange&dr=entire&so=relevance&sf=text&sf=headline&rc=10&rm=200&sp=nrm&clsPage=1&docID=SMH110416RG4AE6H2PUA for a short summary about my 'live-in' research experience in Ultimo.

I asked about workplace culture, about memorable events and for any stories or recollections that participants just wanted to 'get off their chest'. I posed careful, open questions relating to gender and industrial relations, as these topics tended to stir the strongest feelings. The interviews also allowed space for the participants to recollect freely with anecdotes and stories – many took the time to provide detailed accounts of practical jokes, workplace accidents and scandals. Often, however, I did not need to ask many questions and some participants required little prompting before launching into all manner of stories about the Gov, some of which sounded more rehearsed than others.

In the process of interviewing, it quickly became clear that despite my having considered the formal preparations required for high quality oral history practice, things never go quite as planned. One must, to some degree, make it up as one goes along. Australian oral historian Alistair Thomson acknowledged this when he said:

> In practice, oral historians usually find it impossible to follow a single set of techniques or rules for interviewing.[24]

When faced with an individual interview participant, interviewers must rely on their own sensitivity, observation and intuition in order to find the conversation method best suited to interviewing that person.[25] There is no single 'best practice' method appropriate to all oral history participants and my methods shifted in response to each person I met.

One pattern I can share is that many interview participants expressed some degree of suspicion or concern at having to read and sign the (necessarily lengthy) information sheet and consent form required by UTS's Human Research Ethics Committee. The formalities of paperwork did not balance well with the desired informality of 'a tea and a chat'. Nonetheless, there were ways of managing the bureaucratic importunities of formal paperwork, while still making sure that interview participants understood the nature of the research and the conditions of the release agreement. Timing, relaxed contexts and clear verbal explanation were useful strategies.

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[24] A. Thomson (1998), 'Fifty years on: An international perspective on oral history', *Journal of American History*, vol. 85, no. 2, p. 582.

[25] ibid.

Oral history: discourse and practice

Since the 1960s, historians and sociologists have debated the merits of interviews and oral testimony. The question of whether or not oral history should be used at all was controversial at first.[26] More recently, oral recollections have become a more accepted source for historical analysis; however, this does not mean that interpreting oral testimony is unproblematic or straightforward, and much of the literature on oral history in recent decades provides a framework for engaging with the methodological complexities of oral source materials.[27] As a form of historical inquiry, oral history is both highly valued and criticised for its ability to provide highly subjective historical accounts that are often rich with narrative and emotional and attitudinal content.[28]

Oral testimonies may at once reveal experiences that were hidden from 'official' histories, but they also contain a degree of selectivity, bias, confusion and other results of the vagaries of memory. In historian Paul Thompson's seminal 1978 oral history text, *The voice of the past*, his emphasis falls on the justification of oral history as a legitimate source in the study of history in general.[29] Thompson argues that oral history as an historical source is well geared to provide perspectives from the downtrodden, the marginalised and the overlooked members of society. Thompson claims that the documentation of small details and of individual lives is a powerful (and relatively new) way of understanding history, rather than interpreting history as something full of 'great men' and official documents. These little stories, Thompson says, can show the power of the 'cumulative role of the individual':

> It is this which immediately emerges through life histories: the decisions which individuals make … to leave a job which has become intolerable

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[26] P. Thompson (1988 [1978]), *The voice of the past: Oral history*, second edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, p. 68.

[27] R. Perks & A. Thomson, *The oral history reader*, pp. 3–4.

[28] P. Hamilton (2001), 'Oral history', in G. Davison, J. Hirst & S. Macintyre (eds), *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 486–87; P. Hamilton (1994), 'The knife edge: Debates about memory and history', in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds), *Memory and history in twentieth century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne pp. 14–15.

[29] P. Thompson, *The voice of the past*.

> or to look for a better one … The changing pattern of a million conscious decisions of this kind are of as much, probably more, importance for social change than the acts of politicians which are the usual stuff of history.[30]

In more recent years, oral history scholars have focused less on the need to justify oral history itself and more on the complexity of oral history practice and historical interpretation.[31] The focus has shifted to what historians and social scientists can potentially do with the remarkable information contained within such interviews.

Historian John Shields wrote openly about the complexity of interpreting oral history recollections of working life:

> Recollections of the workplace are invariably coloured by a range of subjectivities: from deliberate exaggeration, distortion and omission to conscious repression and the unintentional conflation of personalities and events. For the sharp-eared historian, this very subjectivity can add a whole new level of meaning to oral history testimony … workers' testimony can be shaped as much by hindsight, collective amnesia and myth-making as by the refracted actuality of past experience and feeling … it is incumbent on the historian to seek to recognise and explain these distortions in oral memory.[32]

It is in this spirit that Alistair Thomson explains that 'unreliable memories' can be seen as 'a resource, not a problem'.[33] Historian John Murphy likewise argues:

> Oral recollection provides particular opportunities to examine the role

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[30] ibid., p. 259.

[31] Observation made in ibid., p. 262. See also: R. Perks & A. Thomson eds (1998), *The oral history reader*, Routledge, London; K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton eds (1994), *Memory and history*; S. Leydesdorff, L. Passerini & P. Thompson eds (1996), *Gender and memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; P. Ashton & P. Hamilton (2010), *History at the crossroads: Australians and the past*, Halstead Press, Sydney and Canberra; J. Murphy (1986), 'The voice of memory: History, autobiography and oral memory', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87, pp. 155–75; P. Hamilton & L. Shopes eds (2008), *Oral history and public memories*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia; L. Passerini (1987), *Fascism and popular memory: the cultural experience of the Turin working class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[32] J. Shields (1992), 'Working life and the voice of memory: An introduction', in J. Shields (ed.), *All our labours: Oral histories of working life in twentieth century Sydney*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p. 3.

[33] A. Thomson, 'Fifty years on', p. 584.

> of memory in reconstituting the past, as a process which occurs in and through language.[34]

Expanding on Murphy's suggestion we can see that it is not only language that works to construct meaning about the past; what is articulated in oral history also draws upon visual, material and spatial memory and understanding. Oral history can also supply insight into a rich culture of storytelling, of trade-based jargon and of institutional or community folklore. It does not, strictly speaking, always tell us exactly what happened. Rather, oral histories tell us how people construct narratives about what happened, which, one could argue, has more influence on the pattern of history anyway.[35]

Despite the complexity of this form of historical inquiry, oral history can also provide insights into workers' experiences on the shop floor that are not accessible in existing official records or printed histories.[36] Together, these interviews begin to depict something of a collective mentality – filled with sentiments, contradictions, repeated phrases and so on – that make up the folkloric life of the Gov. I am able to obtain factual details from existing records. For other stories told by interview participants, the focus need not be on specific historical accuracy or finding 'facts', but on more personal interpretations and values, thus exposing participants' outlook on the world, for example their understanding of their identity and the role that gender might play in that conception.[37]

It is my hope to undertake what Shields calls a 'critical interpretation of oral memories'. Shields explains:

> It may not be enough … simply to 'let workers speak for themselves' – to accept their testimony as the literal truth. But when they do choose

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[34] J. Murphy (1986), 'The voice of memory: History, autobiography and oral memory', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87, p. 157.

[35] M. Cortazzi (1993), *Narrative analysis*, The Falmer Press, London & Washington D.C; B. Czarniawska (2004), *Narratives in social science research*, Sage Publications, London; D. Silverman (2001), *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text, and interaction*, 2nd edn, Sage Publications, London, p. 272.

[36] P. Hamilton, 'Oral history', pp. 486–87.

[37] B. Davies & R. Harré (1990), 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 43–63; S. Leydesdorff, L. Passerini, & P. Thompson, op. cit.

> to speak, the least we can do is to extend to them both a hearing and a critical understanding.[38]

Being aware of these layers of complexity is vital to understanding oral history material, and presenting it in context. As with my interpretation of archival photographs, it is important to acknowledge and understand how the process of oral history is not just about capturing meaning that is 'out there' in the world. Oral history actually constructs and generates meaning on a number of levels; this happens through the processes of questioning and listening, through transcription and finally, through quotation and dissemination.[39] First, the interview itself is an instance where meaning is co-constructed by the interviewer and the oral history participant, and the act of getting a person to talk is a delicate and sometimes highly strategic matter.[40] Later on, the act of listening to and transcribing recorded oral histories also conveys understandings that can only be sensed, not easily reduced to language: changes in tenor, pitch, pauses, non-verbal exclamations and hesitations all add extra layers of meaning.[41] This is why I opted to transcribe all the interviews myself (rather than having that work outsourced), a time-consuming but necessary process that allowed in-depth exposure to audio material.

Oral history and material culture studies have great symbiotic potential, given the interview's ability to bring to the fore embodied accounts and tangible details.[42] Although material culture and embodied experience are significant elements in this research, interview participants were not guided too sharply in the direction of providing sensory recollections of objects and machinery; this was done so as to not force any observations.[43] As the following quote indicates, however, the interviews were often peppered with embodied and sensory descriptions. Former

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[38] J. Shields, op. cit. p. 118–19.

[39] A. Oak (2006), 'Particularising the past: Persuasion and value in oral history interviews and design critiques', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 247, 345–56; B. Donnelly (2006), 'Locating graphic design history in Canada', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 287–88; L. Linthicum (2006), 'Integrative practice: Oral history, dress & disability studies', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 309–18.

[40] S. McHugh (2007), 'The aerobic art of interviewing', *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, vol. 18, December, pp. 147–54.

[41] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, p. 12.

[42] L. Sandino (2006), 'Oral histories and design: objects and subjects', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 280.

[43] For discussions of the careful handling of material culture in oral history, see Sandino, 'Oral histories and design', pp. 275–82; J. Wilton (2008), 'Telling objects: Material culture and memory in oral history interviews,' *Oral History Association of Australia Journal,* vol. 30, pp. 41–49.

compositor Neil Lewis talked about the apprentice compositors' pastime of flicking type:

> But jeeze, times I was left with little scabs on me legs, where people have got you in the legs from flicking type. We used to get into trouble for it, but you could always … they used to have Venetian blinds on the windows, and someone'd be head down, doing something, and you'd hear this *pppfffsssshhhhh*, right past you, and then the little piece hits the Venetian blinds – *tink*! <laughs> It's amazing no one got a lost eye out of it.[44]

The movement and sound conveyed in this quote alone adds a great deal to the still and silent photographic collection. The participants had some awareness of the fact that I came from the UTS School of Design, but my research focus was explained in deliberately general terms, so as to avoid overly prescriptive responses (in other words, to avoid the risk of interviewees trying to guess what I might want to hear, to the extent that this is possible). Interviewees were informed that I was interested in 'technological change and working life' at the Government Printing Office and that my focus was on the Ultimo years.[45]

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson remind us that there is 'a complex multiplicity of gendered, cultural and identity-specific variables that we must negotiate as interviewers'.[46] As others before me have noted, an interviewer's subject position not only affects the process of interpretation and writing, the subjectivity of the interviewer also shapes the nature and content of the interviews themselves.[47] As with all social discourse, oral history participants' responses are (often unwittingly) modified to the presumed subject position of their interviewer. This means that in this project (as with others), matters of class, gender, workplace experience and locational origin were all factors that had to be negotiated before, during and after the interview.

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[44] Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

[45] See the Appendix for the oral history information sheet and consent form.

[46] R. Perks & A. Thomson, op. cit., p. 118.

[47] J. Lorber-Kasunic (2011), 'Receding visions of pastoral idyll: An ethnographic and photographic study of marginal farming in the Maranoa', PhD thesis, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney; S. McHugh, op. cit.; R. Perks & A. Thomson, op. cit., p. 117; C.K. Riessman (2002), 'Doing justice: Positioning the interpreter in narrative work', in W. Patterson (ed.), *Strategic narrative: New perspectives on the power of personal and cultural stories*, Lexington Books, Langham MD, pp. 193–214; L. Sandino, op. cit., p. 275.

Before I commenced the interviews, my background research ensured that I had become reasonably *au fait* with printing industry terminology and that I understood the essential processes, politics and industrial conflicts of the industry in Australia. I was aware that some interview participants felt it was their duty to educate me about printing technology. Some spent a great deal of time explaining to me how things worked and wanted to make sure that I understood hot-metal typesetting and the makeready process for letterpress printing. I did not entirely discourage this sort of explanation, even though it occasionally resulted in long and turgid descriptions. Such a thorough description of obsolete technology can, in and of itself, be a significant addition to the historical record. At other times this kind of conversation opened a window to what participants thought was most important or most exciting about their work and indicated their immense pride in possessing a 'hard-won' trade skill and maintaining all the acquired knowledge that goes with it.

As a tertiary-educated younger woman, I found that some participants – particularly older men – would occasionally address me in a manner that might be construed as patronising and they were at times unwilling to tell me stories that they deemed 'unfit for my ears'. Interview participants' reticence to talk generally emerged in relation to supposedly 'dirty' stories, such as stories about streakers, swearing and apprentice initiations. For example, apprentice initiations – 'hazing' rituals that could involve sexual and/or violent humiliation – were often mentioned in passing, but then handled with a 'delicacy' accorded to women in former decades.[48] As an interviewer I was also aware that asking direct questions regarding matters such as apprentice initiation (which was essentially a form of institutionally-condoned child abuse) could in fact be too intrusive and painful for the interview participant to recount. Given the scope of this research, I did not need to deal in detail with this particular topic, but it can be said that the Gov could at times be a very brutal and abusive environment for young apprentices, even in the 1970s and 1980s.

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[48] J. Shields, *All our labours*, pp. 106–07.

During interviews, participants' comments about women undertaking apprenticeships were occasionally modulated in deference to their interviewer (with participants perhaps sugar-coating the transition to mixed apprentice intakes, in a way that they might not have if their interviewer had been male). These verbal concessions were often relatively easy to pick. Rehearsed phrases, internal contradictions and clichés characterised some of the discussions about women undertaking apprenticeships. Although sexist and/or biased opinions were shared during some interviews, this of course does not mean that the interview testimony is invalid; it must be assessed in relation to the circumstances in which the statement emerged and the social values and conventions that apply, both today and in the past.

Assumptions based on my gender and assumed inexperience could sometimes work to my advantage. On occasion, it allowed me to take note of particular contradictions, discrepancies and over-simplifications that may not have come to light had I given the interviewee the impression that I 'knew it all'.[49] On the other hand, in other interviews participants were sometimes impressed to find that I knew many of the names and details about their old workplace; in some cases this had the effect of setting them at ease. Towards the end of one interview, former Linotype operator Bob Law remarked (perhaps with some relief): 'Oh, you know a lot about the place. You're doin' really well.'[50] The following exchange with former compositor and Linotype supervisor Geoff Hawes shows a similar dynamic:

> Geoff: Oh that's Don McMillan. Peter Stock! God. Haven't seen him in years. He was apprentice supervisor – that's what he's doing there. What's her name?
>
> *Jesse: Marianne Cook?*
>
> Geoff: Yes! God, you're good!
>
> *Jesse: People have told me [the names].*
>
> Geoff: Pelican! Jeff Camden. Everyone had nicknames. Mine used to be Slim.

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[49] Oral historian Siobhan McHugh has explained a similar scenario, where her 'mild manner and heavily pregnant condition perhaps led him to underestimate my understanding', allowing her to pick up certain discrepancies in an interview. See S. McHugh, op. cit., pp. 147–54.

[50] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

Ray Holten! What's that girl's name?

Jesse: Someone suggested Cathy Stilgoe?

Geoff: Aaaah! I think you're right. Yeah. Blimey, some of these faces

<pause> where do you get all this stuff from?[51]

This passage also indicates how the discussion of photographs could sometimes degenerate into the 'naming of names' and thus it was better to save the photographs to the end of the interview.

The Government Printing Office photographic collection

This historical study of the NSW Government Printing Office began with photographs. More precisely, my discovery of the Gov happened by chance, through an online photographic search on the State Library of New South Wales' (SLNSW) pictures catalogue. With little prior knowledge of the former workings of Australian government printing, I stumbled across thousands of photographs in the SLNSW's 'Government Printing Office Collection', including hundreds of photographs of the office and factory interiors of the Gov itself.[52] The NSW Government Printing Office picture collection at the SLNSW is a remarkably diverse resource for nineteenth and twentieth century images of NSW, comprising 208,706 digital images and photographic copy negatives. The collection grew from the production of the Gov's photographic section, which from the 1860s provided visual documentation of the colony's major events, public buildings and labour activities. Initially, photographers at the Gov were employed to promote the NSW colony to Great Britain; in some respects its function was to show how 'civilised' and 'developed' New South Wales had become. In the twentieth century the Gov's photographers produced photographs for the state government departments of Works, Tourism, Police and Main Roads. The photographic collection also benefited from donations of images, most notably from the *Star* newspaper's photographic collection.

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[51] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012. Geoff may have been referring to Alan Holten here.

[52] NSW Government Printing Office (1988) *Priceless Pictures from the Remarkable NSW Government Printing Office Collection 1870–1950*, Government Printer, Sydney, pp. 6–8. See also the State Library of NSW's information on the Government Printing Office picture collection: http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemdetailpaged.aspx?itemid=153687.

Fig. 15. **The Government Printing Office hosting the NSW State Election Tally Room,** 17 November 1973, in the canteen on the fifth floor. Bob Askin retained the premiership. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 22013.

One of the most intriguing aspects about the Gov's collection is that its photographic section turned its lens on itself, so to speak, to record its own workplace. The images range from close-ups of equipment and posed shots at award presentations to architectural views of the Gov's purpose-built factory building. New, modern factory spaces appear orderly, expansive and polished in 1958, before the machinery, equipment and workers moved into the new building. In photographs from the 1960s to the 1980s, print workers pose amid stacks of paper, heavy cast-iron presses and electronic typesetting machines. Press-machinists stand facing printing equipment and compositors in collared shirts and shorts slouch over computer keyboards. Bookbinders wield hand tools and compositors attend to pages of type laid out on imposition slabs. Men in suits, grinning, assemble next to boxy electronic equipment. Gazing at these images in early 2011, it felt like my existing research interests in human-machine interaction, gender-labour relations and material culture had converged in one immense picture collection.

Fig. 16 **NSW Government Printing Office photographers, c. 1960s.** Photograph provided by Allan Townsend, reproduced with permission.

As stated earlier, these images are not a direct window into 'working life' at the Gov. The nature and function of these photographs is various and we cannot treat them as straightforward 'documentary' evidence. Many photographs were produced for promotional or reporting purposes, such as annual reports or apprentice recruitment, and thus depict consciously posed scenarios. The staged or constructed nature of certain photographs does not, however, discount their value as sources, particularly when combined with oral histories. Institutional photographs also operate in a different way materially; the Government Printing Office collection is generally experienced not as a set of physical objects but as digital images in an online catalogue, and so

the material connection to the past is once removed, not something that can be tangibly 'felt' in one's hands.[53] While I used printed copies of the Gov's photographs when interviewing participants, the print-outs themselves of course held no special object 'aura'; they were low-quality facsimiles, digitised institutional reproductions.[54]

In a similar process to that undertaken with oral histories, the gleaning of photographic meaning is contingent upon the contexts of interpretation that emerge during the interview and, afterwards, in the processes of visual analysis, the presentation and writing of history. Photographic theory has established that meaning in historical photographs is not simply given, waiting to be discovered.[55] Rather, meaning is deeply contingent upon the 'subject position' of the viewer (who they are, what they know, where they come from) and the contexts of interpretation and presentation. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has explored how in photographs (as with oral histories) meaning is produced on a number of levels, and it changes at different historical stages.[56]

In examining these photographs we are reminded that the Gov was once a place that was overflowing with people and things: machines, printed products, workers, tools, containers, surfaces and modern, organised factory space, spaces to eat, spaces to change out of work clothes. I wanted to know more about the physical, embodied dimensions of the Gov as a workplace – it was once full of smells, sounds, tactility and relationships between people and things. In other words, I sought to learn more about the organisational, associative and atmospheric dimensions

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[53] The original glass plate negatives are held with NSW State Records but they are not publicly accessible due to conservation concerns.

[54] W. Benjamin (1999 [1936]), 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', *Illuminations*, Pimlico, London, pp. 211–44.

[55] S. Buck-Morss (2004), 'Visual studies and global imagination', *Papers of surrealism*, vol. 2, Summer, pp. 1–29, http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/acrobat_files/buck_morss_article.pdf, visited 25 November 2013; A. Sekula, (1988 [1975]), 'On the invention of photographic meaning', in V. Goldberg (ed.), *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, pp. 452-54; D. Price & L. Wells (2000), 'Thinking about photography: Debates, historically and now', in L. Wells (ed.), *Photography: A critical introduction*, Routledge, London, pp. 9–64; J. Tucker with T. Campt (2009), 'Entwined practices: Engagements with photography in historical inquiry', *History and theory*, vol. 48, December, pp. 1–8; S. Hall ed. (1997), *Representation, cultural representations and signifying practices*, Sage, London, pp. 13–74; A. Ramamurthy (2000), 'Constructions of illusion: Photography and commodity culture', in L. Wells (ed.), *Photography: A critical introduction*, Routledge, London & New York, pp. 165–214.

[56] S. Hall, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

of this space. While the Gov institution is in many ways an absent thing, sold off and destroyed, I knew the potential to access memories and documentation related to those material surroundings was not entirely lost. It was not so long ago that the Gov was a fully-functioning government establishment. As noted in the Introduction, the Gov was abolished in July 1989. My research began in 2011. It occurred to me that many people who worked at the Gov would still be alive. This was the trigger that prompted me to initiate this oral history project.

Fig. 17 **Ray Edwards hand-binding books, 1981.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 17542.

Fig. 18 **Eric Berry, Client Services, with colleague in open-plan office, 1985**. Posed photograph taken for the NSW Government Printing Office stand at the Royal Easter Show, Sydney. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 39196.

Fig. 19 **NSW Government Printing Office canteen, 1967.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 33862.

Fig. 20 **Factory floor view (probably binding area), 1985.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 43301.

Philosopher Susan Buck-Morss reminds us that meaning in historical photographs is an ever-changing, mutable thing and that the same photograph may mean something very different to an historian compared to what it might mean to a former employee. The process of bringing photographs into an interview context and publishing them in a dissertation produces meaning.

> Images are the archive of collective memory. The twentieth century distinguishes itself from all previous centuries because it has left a photographic trace. What is seen only once and recorded, can be perceived any time and by all. History becomes the shared singularity of an event. The complaint that images are taken out of context (cultural context, artistic intention previous contexts of any sort) is not valid. To struggle to bind them again to their source not only impossible (as it actually produces a new meaning) it is to miss what is powerful about them, their capacity to generate meaning, not merely to transmit it.[57]

[57] S. Buck-Morss, op. cit., p. 23.

Photographs, like oral history interviews, provide fertile but subjective territory for exploration of human society, helping us navigate issues about how we shape our world, how this world shapes us and how we attempt to capture it before it vanishes.[58] There are risks, however, that the exploration of black-and-white historical photographs can slip into the terrain of nostalgia.[59] One must remain wary of a photograph's ability to produce simplistic, 'rose tinted' attitudes to the past. Nonetheless, the mutable status of photographic meaning allows such images to trigger fruitful discussion and generate new ways of understanding older worlds.

A collection at risk

From the 1960s to 1986 the glass-plate and film negatives of these photographs were stored in the basement of the Ultimo building, in conditions that were less than ideal, particularly for the preservation of glass-plate negatives. The 1988 Government Printing Office publication *Priceless pictures: From the remarkable Government Printing Office collection 1870–1950* describes the storage conditions:

> A trip to the photographic archive of the NSW Government Printing Office once meant entering another world. The archive had the atmosphere of somewhere outside time. It was a long low room whose walls were lined with rows and rows of glass negatives stored vertically in wooden racks. In the centre of the room was a large cabined filled from floor to ceiling with piles of cardboard boxes of negatives. The only light came from fluorescent tubes; the place smelled of printing and photography.[60]

By the 1980s, a number of staff members at the Gov began to feel troubled by the storage conditions of these materials, which placed some plates at risk of water damage, scratches and breakage.

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[58] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit., p. 10.

[59] S. Sontag, op. cit., p. 15.

[60] *Priceless pictures*, p. 6.

Former senior manager Pamela Pearce had moved to the Gov from the Australian Museum in 1986. She describes her shock at seeing the conditions surrounding the glass-plates and her commitment to the project of conserving, digitising and cataloguing them:

> There were glass plates *everywhere*, water pipes for the building ran across the ceiling, above the glass plates. And I'd just come from the Museum, with some of the most wonderful artefacts … I just nearly died, there were broken plates everywhere. These had just been thrown into the basement. So I was totally, totally committed to that project. And I basically put my heart and soul into it. We appointed someone to do the work; we got the plates all catalogued, bringing in an indexer … We started from a basement floor, with the plates lying around <pause> some might have been still in slots, but lots lying around. Plates had been broken because people had pulled them out. And as I said, steam pipes and water pipes running across the ceiling, which could drop and drip … So that was something that I'm extremely proud of.[61]

Sandra Elizabeth Stringer from the Graphic Reproduction section was similarly aghast at the inappropriate storing of the archival photographs:

> I was heartbroken, you know, the whole time I worked there, because where they kept the glass negatives was underneath the boiler room. Then one of my tasks was when the Boiler Room had one of its 'kaputsky' situations of leaking pipes, one of my tasks was to go through all of the negatives and the glass plates to find out what was what … I had to go and count the glass plates. And every time you counted them there were less, which was sorta like, a real tragedy … They weren't stored in a really good environment … That was one of the things that I just thought was so insane. Why keep something that I thought was so precious, you know,

[61] Pamela Pearce, interview with author, 23 January 2012. Italics indicate speaker's emphasis.

> in such a precarious situation? … I really liked it when Granville May did the Bicentennial Archives Project.[62]

In 1986 the Gov was awarded a grant from the NSW Bicentennial Secretariat to conserve its photographic collection. A company named the Laser Picture Studio was formed to copy the negatives, index the collection and transfer the images to film on videodisk (at the time an advanced method for digitally recording image data). Granville May, [Fig. 21] a former printer and administrator who managed the Gov's Bicentennial Picture Project, recalled:

> It was not maintained. The guy that was looking after – I think 'custodian' might be a bit too strong a word – this guy was absolutely slack, really. He wouldn't wear gloves, you know, it was his domain, you know, he's been there for half a century or whatever the case was not well maintained. Dusty. Although they had proper racks, and books to document it, which were handwritten!

Fig. 21 **Granville May, 1987**, photograph taken for the 1987 *Annual Report* demonstrating use of the laser disks for the Bicentennial Picture Project, cataloguing the Government Printing Office photographic collection. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 45991.
'The whole focus changed from the Bicentennial Project for a demonstration of the pictorial history of NSW, to a conservation program plus an exhibition. So I took it to that stage. Because I thought – what are we going to do with this collection?'
– Granville May.

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[62] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

Granville continued:

> It was beautifully scripted, I mean, it's unbelievable. Every glass plate had its own entry, hand-written in these big ledgers. … Under [Stuart Lincolne's] direction we set up a project called the Bicentennial Project, and it was to basically initially make the photo-graphic collection accessible. Because Don West was tired of seeing the same images appearing in magazines … It was the same images being used repetitively. So that was damaging the glass, of course … So I was charged with that, and I went and spoke to Sony Australia about their 'laserdisk' technology which was brand new, and so I then got put in charge of the Bicentennial Project.[63]

The videodisk system involved using a computer to search for an image in the collection, and displaying the photograph on a digital monitor. For its time, the Bicentennial Picture Project was seen as technologically 'cutting-edge' and this suggests that certain sectors of the Gov were keen to embrace new and emerging digital technologies.[64]

After the Gov's closure in 1989, the copy negatives and videodisks were transferred to the SLNSW and the original glass-plate negatives were passed on to NSW State Records, where they remain today. In the mid-1990s the SLNSW digitised the videodisc images and since 1999 images dated between 1870 and 1988 are publicly available online. The effect of digitising the videodisk images (rather than re-scanning the copy negatives) resulted in what appear to be very low-resolution images available online. Upon request (and, of course, for a fee), the SLNSW will re-scan the photographic negatives in this collection and provide high-resolution photographs. Many of the photographs that appear in this dissertation are scanned negatives that underwent this process. The images available for public online searches, however, are the videodisk scans and hence are very low quality. While this minor detail about image quality may seem trivial, the fuzziness of the images can potentially result in a strange sense of interpretive distance, as

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[63] Granville May, interview with author, 8 February 2012.

[64] The Gov cannot be wholly dismissed as technologically 'backward', simply because it was slow to phase out hot-metal typesetting.

if gazing at the past through layers of cellophane. Being able to access high-resolution images allowed the small details to come to the fore – a process that was vital for proper visual analysis and the close study of material culture.

Existing research on oral history and photography

The combination of oral history and photography is a discussion that was spurred on in 2011 by Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson's edited collection of essays, *Oral history and photography*.[65] Prior to Freund and Thomson's publication, oral historians' references to using photographs occurred haphazardly[66] and the organised theoretical discussion about photographs in the oral history process was a notable gap in English-language oral history literature.[67] Oral history has come some distance since the early advice to oral historians to be wary of using photographs during interviews, as they could easily 'generate false memories'[68] or kill the conversation entirely.[69]

Freund and Thomson observe that the intersection between oral history and photography is not a new phenomenon in practice.[70] The handling of photographs and other imagery is without a doubt well integrated into the work of historians and oral historians alike. While earlier studies tended to treat photographs as memory triggers in interviews, as 'evidence' to back up a verbal claim, or simply as illustrations to accompany quotes,[71] the possibilities are more diverse and complex.[72] It is well established that oral history is a process that produces and generates

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[65] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit.

[66] ibid., pp. 19–23. Freund and Thomson provide a thorough list of oral history publications that refer to the use of photographs.

[67] ibid., p. 3; B.M. Robertson (2012), 'Book review: Oral history and photography', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, vol. 34, p. 78.

[68] P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 134.

[69] E. Stokes, 'United we stand', p. 55. Stokes advised interviewers against the use of photographs during the interview process, citing one example where the method was unsuccessful.

[70] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit., p. 2.

[71] See for example: P. Hamilton (2005), *Cracking Awaba: Stories of Mosman and the Northern Beaches community during the Depression*, SHOROC Libraries (Shore Regional Organisation of Councils), Sydney; M. Park (1997), *Doors were always open: Recollections of Pyrmont and Ultimo*, City West Development Corporation, Sydney.

[72] A. Freund & A. Thomson, op. cit.

meaning on a number of levels: through the processes of listening and asking questions, through transcription and finally, through quotation and dissemination.[73] The idea that oral history constitutes a co-construction of meaning, where interviewer and participant work together to produce historical meaning through conversation, is now well-established in oral history literature.[74] The matter that is still somewhat under-discussed, however, is the multiplicity of interpretive functions of historical photographs when introduced into this context.

Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky's *Envisioning Homestead* project is notable in this context, chiefly because these historians interpreted photographic material as being a major part of what the participants had to say.[75] In researching the community of Homestead, Pennsylvania, Modell and Brodsky brought along their own selection of photographs (from press images and community archives) and encouraged participants to provide some of their own personal images.[76] Their aim was that the photographs would act not only as reminders, nor as mere 'illustrations' to stories.[77] Instead, the photographs would become part of 'a conversation about the past' in a context wherein the interviewer and participant would collectively examine the photographs, offering possible explanations, interpretations and sharing ideas.[78] For Modell and Brodsky, their use of photographs helped these participants to put their experiences in a broader historical context, to 'make these points "history"'.[79] The use of photographs in oral history interviews can enable what Modell and Brodsky call a 're-viewing' of verbal history and it can affirm the spoken word, sometimes adding specificity and confidence to the participants' recollections.[80]

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[73] K. Borland (2006), 'That's not what I said: Interpretive conflict in oral narrative research', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader*, pp. 310–21; B. Davies & R. Harré, op. cit., pp. 43-63; P. Hamilton, 'The knife edge', p. 15; S. McHugh, op. cit., pp. 147–54; J. Murphy, 'The voice of memory', pp. 155–75; A. Oak, op. cit., pp. 345–56; H.E. Sypher, M.L. Hummert & S.L. Williams (1994) 'Social psychological aspects of the oral history interview', in E.M. McMahan & K.L. Rogers (eds) *Interactive oral history interviewing*, Lawrence Erlbaum & Assoc., Hillsdale, N.J., & Hove, pp. 47–62.

[74] R. Perks & A. Thomson, 'Interviewing', in *The oral history reader*, p. 118.

[75] J. Modell & C. Brodsky (1994) 'Envisioning Homestead: Using photographs in interviewing', in *Interactive oral history interviewing*, op. cit., pp. 141–61.

[76] ibid., p. 143.

[77] ibid., p. 142.

[78] ibid., p. 145.

[79] ibid., p. 159.

[80] ibid., p. 145.

This dynamic was particularly apparent in my interview with press-machinist Victor Gunther. He worked as a printing machinist at the Government Printing Office in Phillip and Bent streets (before the Gov moved to the new building in Ultimo). Victor began as a 'rouseabout' at the Gov in 1946 when he was 15 years old and he was indentured as a letterpress machinist apprentice in 1947.[81] Photographs were a central part of this interview because Victor had brought a published book of Government Printing Office photographs with him (*Priceless Pictures*[82]) and during the interview he regularly pointed to particular photographs that had significance to the stories he wanted to tell. Here, Victor pointed to Fig. 22:

> Let me show you something in here. <opens *Priceless Pictures*> When I started. I'll get the page right <pause, opens to page with Fig. 22>

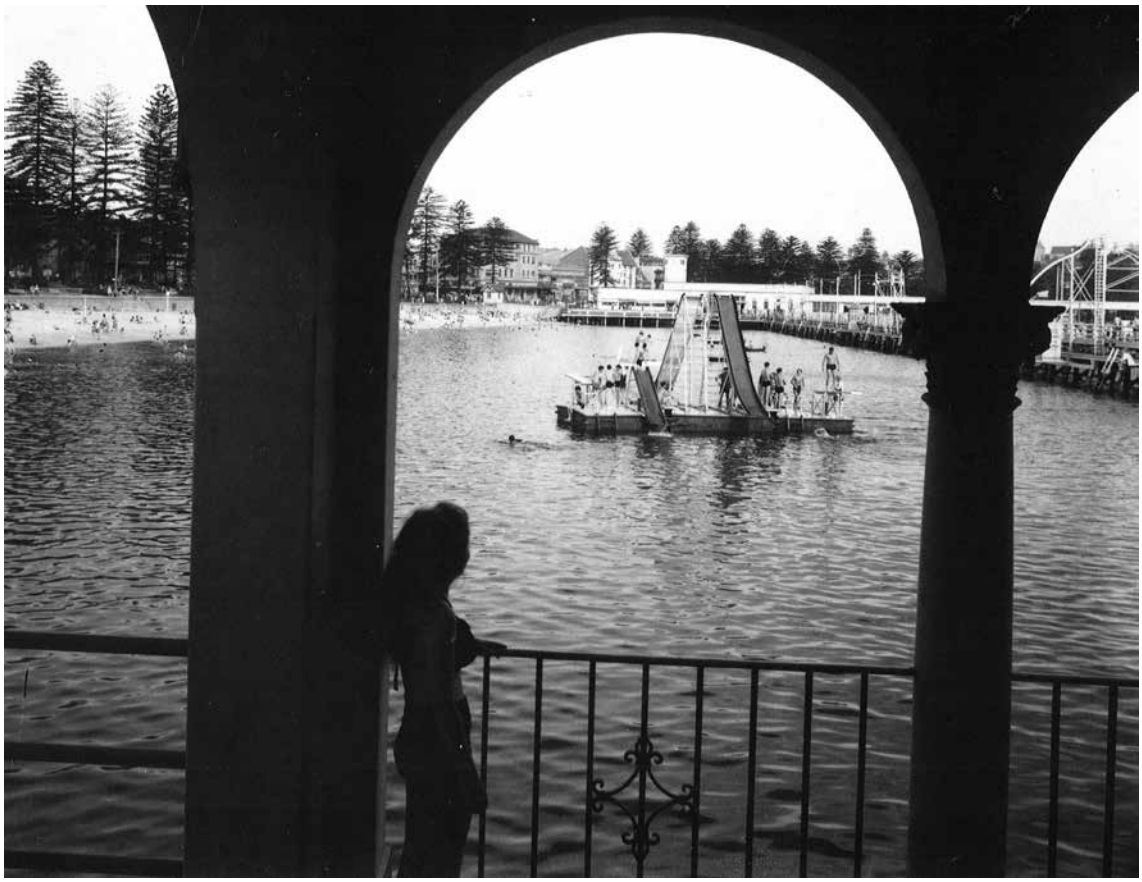

Fig. 22 **Slippery dip, Manly Baths Sydney, 1947.** Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 36553. Reproduced in *Priceless pictures*: *From the remarkable NSW Government Printing Office Collection 1870–1950*, p. 81.

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[81] A *rouseabout* is a general-hand or runner-boy. In the early to mid-twentieth century, boys of 14 and 15 years old typically spent one year as a rouseabout before commencing their apprenticeship at the Gov.

[82] *Priceless pictures*, op. cit.

> 'Slippery dip, Manly Baths Sydney 1947.' Right? 1947. That's when I got me apprenticeship. I was living over there in Manly. I used to catch the ferry to go to work every day, down at Manly Wharf. This slippery dip, <pause> I used to dive for money. Thruppence, ha'pennies and pennies. I'd dive in and put 'em in me mouth. They'd throw out thruppence and sixpence <pause> and they're the best ones, because when they hit the water and they go down like that, you could see 'em shine, and you'd could grab 'em, put 'em in your mouth. I used to do two bob or two shillings, out at the back, which was in the harbour side. It was deep water. The rich ones, the people with plenty of money'd throw the two bob out there, and I'd dive in and go after 'em. <pause> Now, that slippery dip: I used to stand up on the top of that and dive into the water, all the way down. People used to come along the Promenade and I'd dive in there and they'd all crowd up on the wharf and watch me, and then I'd bomb them and they'd all get wet, and I'd swim across to this pontoon. That was one of my lurks, when I was younger. Now, that's when I was apprenticed, when I got me papers [indentures]. And that photo was taken in 1947.[83]

During the interview, Victor's recollections sometimes pertained to the Gov and at other times they did not, at least not directly. Of course, as an interviewer I would not have known that the slippery-dip photograph could have any significance for Victor; this was something he (literally) brought to the table. In the act of pointing to this published, institutional photograph, Victor makes his personal story part of his sense of history. His recollection tumbles out in a way that shows a strong interconnection between his identity, his work experience at the Gov, his recreational experience after work and the mnemonic presence of photographs in memory. There is also a powerful sense that Victor wants you to know that he was there, almost right at the moment the photograph was taken, larking about, catching your coins as they fell through the water.

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[83] Victor Gunther, interview with author, 15 August 2012.

In my experience with this project, the use of photographs during the interview process did not always place participants' experiences in context or affirm existing institutional narratives. Rather, the conjunction of oral history interviews and institutional photographs sometimes destabilised established institutional accounts about the Gov, and opened up new avenues for understanding workers' relationships with their institution, as the following two examples attest.

Fig. 23 **Alan Leishman pouring acid toner, 1962.** Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 22009.

'Typical, as they say'

Consider the photograph 'Alan Leishman pouring acid toner, 1962'. [Fig. 23] Alan commenced at the Gov in 1955 when he was apprenticed in photo-etching and engraving. He worked in the photography and lithography sections and became a senior manager, staying until the closure in 1989. The following excerpt is from an interview that was undertaken with another man, Graeme Murray, who had been apprenticed in lithographic dot-etching and engraving in 1960. While Graeme refers to Fig. 23 in the interview, the image was not actually present in front of him. In this way, Graeme's interview took on a visual sensibility, indicating the residual trace of institutional photographs within his memory of working life at the Gov. Graeme recalled:

> We produced all these posters <pause> it was occupational health and safety, but they never knew the word then … But Alan [Leishman] was in a situation where he was working with a lot of dangerous nitric acid, all the time, and he was in an area there where they have massive baths where they put zinc plates in to be etched with this acid. Alan used to have this dustcoat. Everyone had dustcoats … and Alan's one was particularly shredded because of the acid splashes over the years … But they had this poster going on, they wanted to show the safe way of handling acid. So they brought into our section: the proper rubber gloves, up to the elbows, they brought in special aprons, they brought in goggles, hair thing, the whole lot. The photographers photographed him with all this gear on. As soon as they finished photographing him with all this gear on, they took all the gear back, and Alan went back to his dustcoat! Typical, as they say.[84]

As Graeme's comment indicates, photographs had a strong presence in these interviews, even when they were not visible at the time. The quote also tells us about the production and use of one of these photographs in its original context. This discussion also opened up an avenue where

[84] Graeme Murray, interview with author, 9 September 2011.

Graeme was able to talk about how the 'official' institutional version of events differed from his on-site knowledge of the Gov.

One month after interviewing Graeme, I interviewed Alan Leishman and showed him Fig. 23. Seeing the image of himself in 1962, Alan immediately shifted to another (related) story:

> Oh yes! That was the old acid! <laughs> We did have an interesting incident at Liverpool Street. When we were packing up to move [to the new building], there was myself, and a chap called John Devrice. Previous to that, we used to get acid in earthenware jars. We were on the fifth floor, and as he walked around the corner it clipped one of the corners, and a full earthenware jar, [over a foot] high, and pure nitric acid went everywhere! I grabbed him and threw him into a sink … The interesting thing with that photograph is that a lot of that safety equipment was taken away immediately after they photographed it. They came and photographed it for health and safety and they took the equipment away. <laughs> We did get equipment after that, I must say.[85]

In this case, Fig. 23 functions as a memory trigger: Alan immediately recalls the workplace accidents that came with using hazardous materials. But more than that – Alan's comments again remind us that the employees were fully conscious of the staged nature of institutional photographs and they were aware (and somewhat amused) participants in this production of institutional imagery. In other words, they were cognisant of the gap between workplace practices and performed institutional representations.

Here we have moved from the use of a photograph as a memory trigger and an historical document into territory that begins to examine the epistemic status of the image.[86]

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[85] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[86] Freund & Thomson, op. cit., p. 3. Recent oral history literature that involves interviews with photographers also covers this territory, albeit in a different way. Howard Bossen and Eric Freedman write about the way in which steel and industrialisation has been pictured in the past and they conducted oral history interviews with both steelworkers and the photographers who depicted them. See H. Bossen & E. Freedman (2012), 'Molten light: The intertwined history of steel and photography – The roles of oral histories and other first-person accounts', *The Oral History Review*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1–14.

These two interviews opened up discussion about the circumstances in which the image appeared in the first place and how its use evolved over time. Two decades later, in the mid-1980s, the apprentice Sandra Elizabeth Stringer joined the Graphic Reproduction section at the Gov. During her interview, Sandra glanced at Fig. 23 and said:

> That was actually an OH&S poster we used to have on the walls there.[87]

The photograph of Alan Leishman pouring acid toner lived on – as a poster – for almost three decades at the Gov.

Man at a Monotype

Throughout this project it became apparent that the captions provided by the SLNSW online catalogue were often quite limited.[88] For example, specific images are titled with the generic term 'machines' rather than describing their particularities. Oral history interviews enabled me to discover further details about many photographs, although this process must be attempted with caution. Early in my research I had come across a photograph depicting a seated man, captured in profile, who appears to be operating a hot-metal typesetting machine. [Fig. 24] At first glance, one might assume that this image depicts a compositor at work. However, the date of the image – 1985 – is itself of historical interest; for a worker to be operating Monotype or Linotype machines in a large factory context in 1985 was unusual, as this hot-metal typesetting technology was obsolete at this stage. In the SLNSW online catalogue Fig. 24 is captioned simply: 'Photos of printing machines for video presentation'. This suggests that the image was produced for some sort of official presentation purpose, but, as with the image itself, we cannot wholly trust the caption and must interrogate the available visual, spoken and textual sources more critically.

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[87] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012. 'OH&S' refers to 'occupational health and safety'.

[88] Oral history interviews indicate that this photographic collection was thoroughly indexed by staff at the Gov in the 1980s. Unfortunately these indexes are now disconnected from the online image collection.

Fig. 24 **Bob Day pretending to type at a Monotype keyboard, 1985.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 38079.

After a number of oral history interviews in which Fig. 24 was shared, it became clear that this was a Monotype keyboard, that the man posed with the machine was not a Monotype keyboarder and that he was not operating the machine properly. When former compositor Rudi Kolbach considered the image, he could tell from the man's posture that something wasn't right. There are two stages to Rudi's interpretation. Recognition, with a statement, then a closer look:

> Yep. Still workin' on the Monotype keyboard. Well, <long pause> they didn't sit that far away, and they don't have a copy there, and they never, ever looked at the keyboard, because they learned to touch type, without any need to look there.[89]

As Rudi explains, there was no copy present from which to type.

Former Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville had a similar response, but he also indicated his embodied knowledge of the practice of Monotype setting:

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[89] Rudi Kolbach, interview with author, 12 December 2011.

> Oh, there's a Monotype, yeah. That was the old thing. <pause> No copy in there – he's not working! He hasn't got any copy on the board! And <pause> ahh ahh <pause> that hose doesn't look like it's connected anyway. So he wouldn't be setting like that. Look at it! He's too far back. Look at his back, he'd kill himself. You had to sit with your legs apart, to get close enough. Then you had to swing it around, to use the bold and italics and so on.[90]

There is pleasure in Lindsay's analysis here, pleasure in being able to 'read' this photograph expertly enough to ascertain swiftly that the photograph was in some way staged. When compositors such as Lindsay might have assumed that their traditional printing skills and knowledge were permanently lost, this process allowed them to put their craft skills to use again.

Another interview participant was able to identify the man pictured. Former Linotype operator Bob Law's response adds detail in describing the character of the man pictured:

> There's Bobby Day! This man was a Mono-caster. Bob Day. He passed away. He wasn't a Monotype operator. That was a posed photo. He was a real character, he'd walk around ... he'd just had a haircut, and everyone was really bagging him about his shocking haircut, and he'd walk around and say, 'I went to the barber's yesterday, and I said, "Make me like a fighter!"' 'Cos all boxers in those days used to have real basin cuts. He was a funny bloke. But he's long gone, too.[91]

The man sitting at the Monotype keyboard – Bob Day – was not indentured as a Monotype keyboard operator; he operated a hot-metal Monotype caster machine (a large machine for producing individual metal letters from rolls of punched tape) in an adjacent room at the Gov.

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[90] Lindsay Somerville, interview with author, 15 December 2011.

[91] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

Linotype operator Geoff Hawes confirmed this identification:

> Bobby Day! That guy sittin' at that keyboard would not know anything about it! He was a mono caster operator, and they've got a photo of him sittin' at a machine! He wouldn't know a thing about it.[92]

There is a hint of ruffled feathers in Geoff's response. The fact that he specifically mentions Bob Day's trade (Monotype casting) is significant. Geoff emphasises that Bob would have had no knowledge of how to use this machine, he was *pretending* to be a Monotype keyboarder. Monotype keyboarding was traditionally seen as a higher status printing trade than the casters[93] and in normal circumstances demarcation rules set by the PKIU would have strictly prevented Bob Day from even touching a Monotype keyboard.

We have discovered that this image was posed and that it depicts a scenario that is not a scene of 'actual' work at the Gov. This should not be perceived as a problem, nor does it lessen the photograph's historical value as a source. When brought into an interview context, this photograph discloses a moment of play, once a manual trade had disappeared. It also brings to light an aspect of the trade demarcation rules of this period in the printing industry. The fact that this man is pretending to operate this machine is not merely silly; it would have been a significant industrial transgression had the photograph been taken one year before, in 1984.

Why do the years matter? Archival evidence confirms that the Monotype room at the Gov finally closed down in April 1984.[94] By 1985 – the date ascribed to this image – the Monotype keyboard machines were no longer in place in the old Monotype room on the fourth floor. Instead, the machines were taking up space elsewhere at the Gov, redundant machines waiting to be discarded. Bob Day is not performing everyday work at the Gov, he is posing at a recently historicised object, a new relic. The act of posing with this relic and recording the act shows a playful, but also respectful, acknowledgement of the dramatic transitions facing the printing industry.

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92 Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

93 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 44, 52–53.

94 *Government Printing Office Staff Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, April 1984.

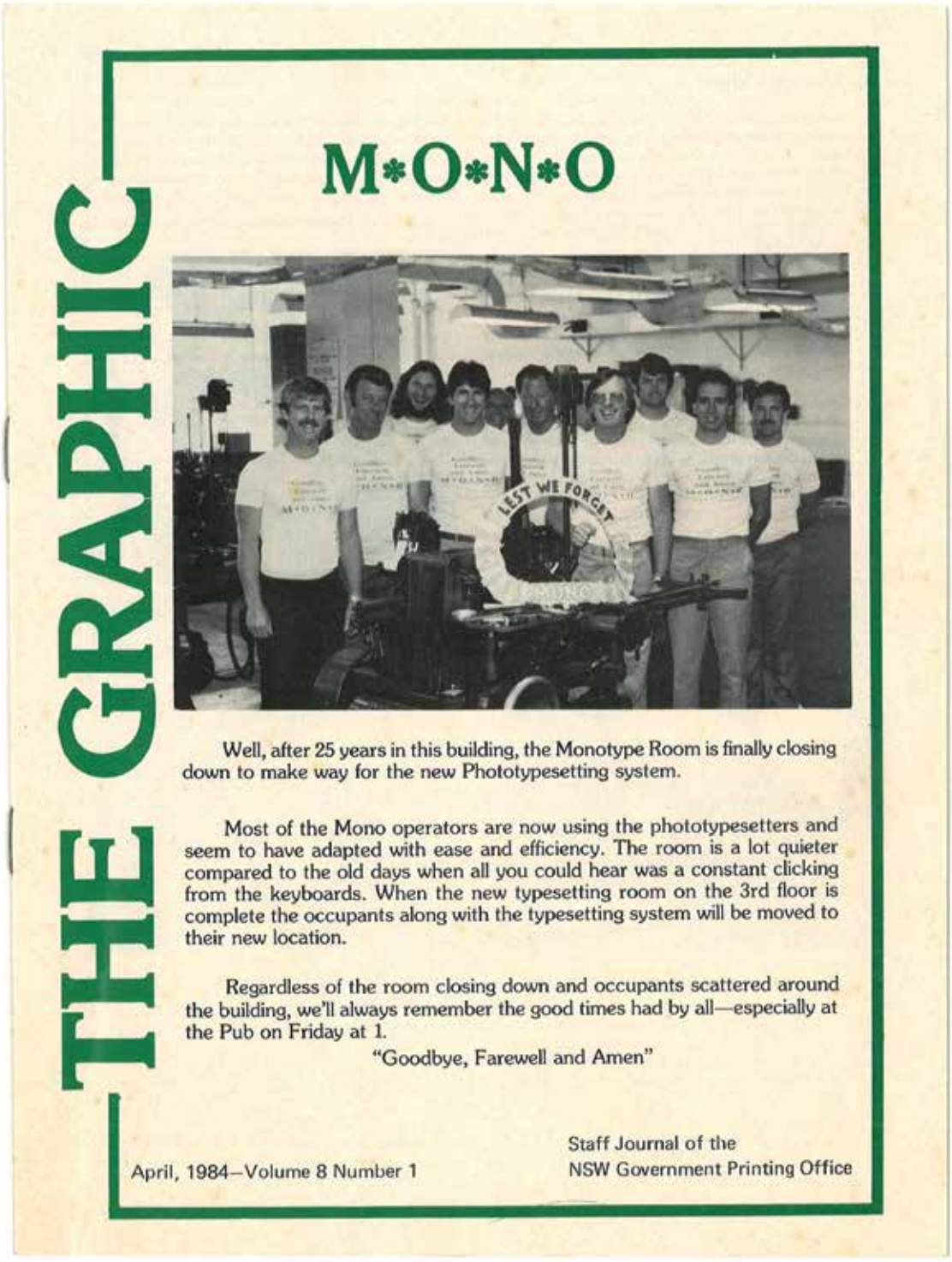

Fig. 25 **Cover of the staff journal,** ***The Graphic***, April 1984. Courtesy of Geoff Hawes.

Once I was able to access a high-resolution version of Fig. 24, a few additional details became clear. In the background of the photograph, a number of large machines (most likely Monotype casting equipment) are swathed in drop-sheets. To the right in the middle ground, a sign reads: 'Goodbye, Farewell and Amen: M * O * N * O'.[95] And so – far from being an image of a man at work, typing at a Monotype machine – this image is a spirited but memorialising tribute to an out-dated technology, a lost trade and an outmoded skill set. The machines that Bob Day would have mastered could well be visible in this photograph; they are (probably) underneath the funereal drop-sheets in the background. When coping with large institutions in the midst of a major transition and technological change, employees can be remarkably adept at expressing humour, giving some solace in a world of bureaucratic madness.

This chapter is not intended to present a comprehensive picture of all of the ways that institutional photographs may be used in an interdisciplinary material culture and labour history project; rather it provides some examples of how the photographs in the *Precarious Printers* project are not mobilised simply as memory triggers or illustrations in the service of oral history. At times, oral quotations and photographs contradict one another, at other times they are mutually reinforcing. The spoken word can open up visual possibilities or a photograph can send us down new narrative paths that may not have otherwise been traversed. The exercise of handling these disparate source materials necessarily involves careful decisions about splicing and mixing, layering and overlapping. It is an ongoing process of judgments, selections, close examination and decoding: telling stories with photographs and producing vivid images with words.

An exploration of the connections between these two types of sources should occur in a manner that is constantly aware of the socially-shaped nature of both photographs and oral testimony, and the role of the historian is to carefully assess the way in which these sources coalesce. The spoken word can open up visual possibilities and the use of photographs (in the interview, and in the interpretive stages that follow) opens up potential for new ways of speaking about the past. The Gov offers a particularly rich example of this, partly because we have the privilege of

[95] The April 1984 *Staff Journal* [Fig. 25] also made reference to the TV series *MASH* in the "M*O*N*O" title.

access to a large and diverse photographic collection held at SLNSW, and because many former employees of the Gov are alive to tell their stories.

These playful or absurd actions – such as Bob Day's memorialising performance at being a Monotype operator, or Alan Leishman's obliging charade demonstrating the supposedly correct use of protective equipment – have become embedded in the historical archive. Without the interview content, these photographs are but two of more than 4000 of images of people at work at the Gov. Once just a few of these photographs are introduced into oral history interviews, new stories emerge, and we are reminded of the ways in which memory, history and visual culture can fruitfully intersect.[96]

The convergence of oral histories and institutional photographs can bring about a productive slippage, or a gap, between what is said and what is pictured. It is precisely because these sources do not match up neatly that the stories and the images are so compelling. This illuminating gap hints at the complexity of labour experience and begins to disclose the relationship that workers had with their workplace. It provides insight into how people coped with the challenges and bureaucratic rituals that characterised this particular public service factory: through irreverence, humour and through a tolerance of the human flaws inherent in bureaucratic process.

[96] J. Tucker (with T. Campt), op. cit., p. 3.

3. Setting the scene: recovering spatial & architectural memories

Fig. 26 **NSW Government Printing Office, Harris Street, Ultimo, 1967.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 37773. With thanks to Mark O'Brien, Global Switch Sydney.

Introduction

> Every building is a condensed world, a microscopic representation.[1]

This chapter is a recovery of the architectural and spatial qualities of the building that housed the NSW Government Printing Office from 1959 to 1989. These aspects are explored through an integration of archival research, oral histories and photographs of the building. This examination is informed by an awareness of how the oral history process contributes to a co-construction of spatial memory, developing between the interviewee and interviewer.

Focusing on the built heritage of an industrial site can tell us only limited things about labour, technology and working life, and without oral history narratives, archives and photographs, the remnant built heritage can be historically misleading. As previously explored in the Introduction, historian Lucy Taksa has argued that a banal, aestheticised focus on the built heritage of industrial worksites is often employed at the expense of richer and more informed human histories of industrial struggle.[2] Given my argument that one can do both – that is, explore material and embodied histories and human stories of working life – it is necessary to consider closely the architectural and spatial environment in which the Gov's workers laboured. An unexpected result of this oral history project was that issues of space and location proved to be very much a part of the interview content.

When stories of the past are recounted and reconstructed in the oral history process, what happens to the spaces that are remembered and discussed? Old buildings are rebuilt, reconfigured, destroyed, and a few gradually become ruins. But what is the significance of architectural and spatial contexts in people's memories of working life? While the idea of remembered domestic space ('memory houses') has been well established in philosophy and

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[1] J. Pallasmaa (2009), 'Space, place, memory and imagination: The temporal dimension of existential space', in M. Treib (ed.), *Spatial recall: Memory in architecture and landscape*, Routledge, New York and London, p. 18.

[2] L. Taksa (2000), ' "Pumping the life-blood into politics and place": Labour culture and the Eveleigh Railway Workshop', *Labour History*, vol. 79, November, pp. 11–34; L. Taksa (2005), 'The material culture of an industrial artifact: Interpreting control, defiance, and the everyday', *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 8–27.

architectural theory,[3] what use can be made of the multiplicity of spatial memories that are produced within a large institutional building? In considering these questions, this chapter looks at the physical, imagined and mentally reconstructed states of the institutional building that housed the Gov between 1959 and 1989. This was a modern building at 390–422 Harris Street, Ultimo, Sydney. The interviews undertaken in the Government Printing Office Oral History Project contain frequent and sometimes very specific references to delineated sections, rooms and levels of the Gov's building, as well as to embodied and spatial experiences of working life. In attending to the multiple 'condensed worlds' contained within this building, this approach considers the Gov as a continually evolving mnemonic spatial projection (among other things). In other words, the Gov continued to exist and transform through memory and this collective and individual form of memory is closely tied to space and location.

Fig. 27 **The third floor interior of the new Government Printing Office building in Ultimo, 1957,** pared back and distinctly modern, before the electrical fittings, plumbing and flooring were installed. Note the necessity for columns; the building was not clear-span owing to the lack of steel production in the 1940s and early 1950s. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 08786. Reproduced in the publication New Government Printing Office (1957).

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[3] G. Bachelard (1994 [1958]), *La poétique de l'espace (The poetics of space)*, Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 3–7. Also quoted in J.M. Malnar & F. Vodvarka (2004), 'Spatial constructs', in *Sensory design*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, pp. 15–18.

This approach recalls the French philosophical positions – exemplified in the writings of Maurice Halbwachs, Gaston Bachelard and Paul Ricœur – that memory is, among other things, a spatial phenomenon.[4] In other words, the experience of memory is thickly imbued with spatial understandings and signifiers. The architectural structure that housed the Gov functioned as a signifier as well as a solid physical vessel, simultaneously embodying, containing and projecting the 'whole world' of the Gov to its employees and clients. Moreover, the oral history interview itself demonstrated a process whereby spatial memory and architectural meaning were *co-constructed* through conversation, with the interviewer and interviewee acting together to produce an ever-changing spatial projection of the institution.

This chapter also provides background detail about the architectural history of the NSW Government Printing Office buildings. The 'new' Government Printing Office building – one of many initiated by NSW Public Works in Sydney in the 1950s and 1960s – might be presumed to have little to offer historically or architecturally. It could be dismissed as an 'ordinary' government building, of no particular architectural interest.[5] But this dissertation is not a claim for the building's architectural significance, per se. The Government Printing Office building holds other historical possibilities for interpretation.

Historian Ralph Kingston has observed that in recent years the writing of social history has demonstrated something of a 'spatial turn' and this has resulted in historians increasingly thinking in spatial terms, paying more attention to things such as 'mental maps', 'social space' and 'lived space'.[6] Kingston acknowledges that an understanding of the constructed and political

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[4] See for example: M. Halbwachs (1980 [1950]), *Space and the collective memory*, trans. F.J. Ditter Jr. & V.Y. Ditter, Harper & Row, New York, pp. 128–56; P. Ricœur (2004), 'The documentary phase: Archived memory', in *Memory, history and forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, pp. 147–53; Bachelard, op. cit., pp. 3–10.

[5] Architectural heritage consultants Graham Brooks & Assoc. produced a heritage assessment of the building for the City West Development Corporation, concluding that: 'The building has a low degree of historical significance as the first Printing Office building in which every phase of activities could be maintained. In terms of aesthetic quality it is considered to have low significance as a discrete item, but due to its bulk it contributes to the view of the distinctive group of woolstores visible from the city. It has limited scientific significance, given that it utilises typical forms of conventional structure and materials … The Government Printing Office building has low heritage significance. The retention of the building is optional, demolition is acceptable.' – G. Brooks & Associates (1998), *Heritage assessment: Government Printing Office and AML&F site*, City West Development Corporation, Sydney, pp. 35–36.

[6] R. Kingston (2010), 'Mind over matter? History and the spatial turn', *Cultural & Social History*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 111–12.

nature of maps and imagined space was already well-established in geography and post-colonial theory, but he notes that a social history approach can take into account spatial relationships while continuing to engage with material objects, social practices and their interactions in everyday life.[7] The discursive flexibility of space makes understanding possible on multiple levels simultaneously: through articulated spatial memory, through visual projection and through solid, architectural structures. Kingston warns, however, that historians must take care with the interpretive flexibility of space, taking into account when they might be pushing an interpretation too far, into fictive territory.[8] With this caution in mind, this approach traces the spatial and architectural qualities and relationships at the Gov through a variety of lenses, including considering the architectural history of the Gov through more traditional sources, such as archival records. Firstly, it is necessary to engage more closely with theories of space and memory.

Space and memory

This is a call for attention to the richness of content contained within spatial memories of this apparently dull industrial-government building. I want to think of the Government Printing Office building both in terms of its reality as a built structure and as what design theorists Joyce Malnar and Frank Vodvarka call a 'spatio-sensory construct' – a building that functions powerfully through remembered embodied experiences, as well as through photographs.[9]

Architect Juhani Pallasmaa has elucidated on the strange connection between architecture and spatial memory, explaining how 'we understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental'.[10] Pallasmaa explains that 'our recollections are situational and spatialised memories' and later reminds us that 'remembering is not only a mental event, but also an act of embodiment and projection'.[11] This understanding of memory as embodied,

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[7] ibid., p. 114.

[8] ibid., p. 117.

[9] J. Malnar & F. Vodvarka, op cit., p. 3.

[10] J. Pallasmaa, 'Space, place, memory, and imagination', p. 17.

[11] ibid., pp. 22, 27.

sensory and, crucially, spatial recalls Halbwachs' writing on space and collective memory.[12] While Halbwachs' focus was on collective memory, his observations about space and memory can also be interpreted in relation to individual experience. In 1950 Halbwachs wrote that:

> Every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures … we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings.[13]

He concludes:

> Never do we go outside space … That we remember only by transporting ourselves outside space is therefore incorrect. Indeed, quite the contrary, it is the spatial image alone that, by reason of its stability, gives us an illusion of not having changed through time and retrieving the past in the present.[14]

Halbwachs describes the relationship between memory and space as a relationship that is often thought to be so obvious that it is not worth observing. His arguments form an important part of refuting the notion the act of memory is something that transports us outside of space and outside of our bodies. Rather, we are kept solidly on the ground, *in* physical space, not outside of it.

Ricœur explains how the 'corporeal and environmental spatiality [was] inherent to the evocation of a memory'.[15] He links this spatialised and embodied mnemonic phenomena with multiple types of space: lived space, geometric space and inhabited space and he associates the idea of history as 'narrated time' with the way space is 'constructed'.[16] Space is constructed both through memory and in a literal, physical sense.[17] Ricœur notes: 'Between "narrated" time and

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[12] M. Halbwachs, *Space and the collective memory*.

[13] ibid., p. 140.

[14] ibid., p. 157.

[15] P. Ricoeur (2004), 'The documentary phase: Archived memory', in *Memory, history and forgetting*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, pp. 148–53.

[16] ibid., pp. 150–53.

[17] ibid.

"constructed" space there are many analogies and overlappings'.[18] This points a way to talk about the Gov's building as both a physical, modernist space and as a continually evolving mental space, a site of narrative construction. Pallasmaa also reminds us of the projected nature of spatial memory, explaining that 'remembering is not only a mental event; it is also an act of embodiment and projection'.[19]

Related arguments have been made in the discipline of geography. Political geographer Edward Soja defined the term 'thirdspace', as a way to capture the 'inherent spatiality of human life'.[20] Thirdspace is a way to combine memory, history and lived experience in a conception of the world. Such an approach recognises the interdependence of spatiality, history and the social. In other words, thirdspace captures social relations. American oral historian Rina Benmayor has explored how Soja's concept of thirdspace may be employed in an oral history project, enabling oral history practitioners to anchor their historical content in a spatial and geographical frame.[21] Benmayor's work places the listener and/or reader of oral history content *on-site*, deepening the experience of learning about history. This sort of in-situ relationship with site was not possible in my project with the Gov, given the building's present use as a high-security data-storage centre.[22]

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[18] ibid., p. 150.

[19] J. Pallasmaa, op. cit., p. 27.

[20] E.W. Soja (1996), *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*, Blackwell, Cambridge, Mass., & Oxford, p. 1.

[21] R. Benmayor (2013), 'Re-imagining Salinas' Chinatown: A 'third space' oral history walking tour', conference paper, *He said, She said: Reading, writing & recording history*, *The South Australian State History Conference / Biannual National Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia*, Adelaide, 21 September.

[22] If the building that housed the Gov were publicly accessible today, this dissertation may have handled the matter of spatial memory differently. Had the oral history interviews for the Government Printing Office project taken place within the old walls of the building, this would likely have produced very different results from these present findings. The building, however, has been extensively refurbished since it once housed the Printing Office, and public access is now prevented by the tight security used by the current occupier of the building, Global Switch (a data storage company that provides server space for corporations and government departments). If things were different, this chapter may have recalled remarkable statements such as James Joyce's oft-quoted phrase, 'places remember events', and gone on to discuss philosopher Edward Casey's insights into the way in which places are the active agent in the making of history and in the act of commemoration. As it is, without physical access to the Gov, we are left with an absent space, with projected spatial memory, and with images (which also have their own complex bounds of negotiation and reinterpretation, as we saw in the previous chapter). E. Casey (1993), *Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 277.

Government Printing Office buildings

Fig. 28. **The Stereo and Electro section of the NSW Government Printing Office, 1891**, Phillip and Bent streets, Sydney, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 08363. With thanks to Richard Peck for the print.

From 1841 the NSW Government Printing Office operated from a number of locations in Sydney's Central Business District (CBD). The Head Office was located at Phillip and Bent streets in the city, initially in the small wooden structures that made up the old Immigration Barracks.[23] Those wooden premises soon became inadequate and new premises were constructed on this site, opening on 26 April 1856.[24] In the decades that followed, the building was regularly

[23] R.C. Peck (2001), *NSW Government Printers and Inspectors of Stamps*, self-published, Sydney, p. 9; G. Powell (1952), 'Tickets by the hundred million', *Sydney Morning Herald (Saturday Magazine)*, 28 June, p. 7; W.A. Gullick (1916), *History of the Government Printing Office*, New South Wales Government Printing Office, Sydney, pp. 3–4.

[24] R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 11.

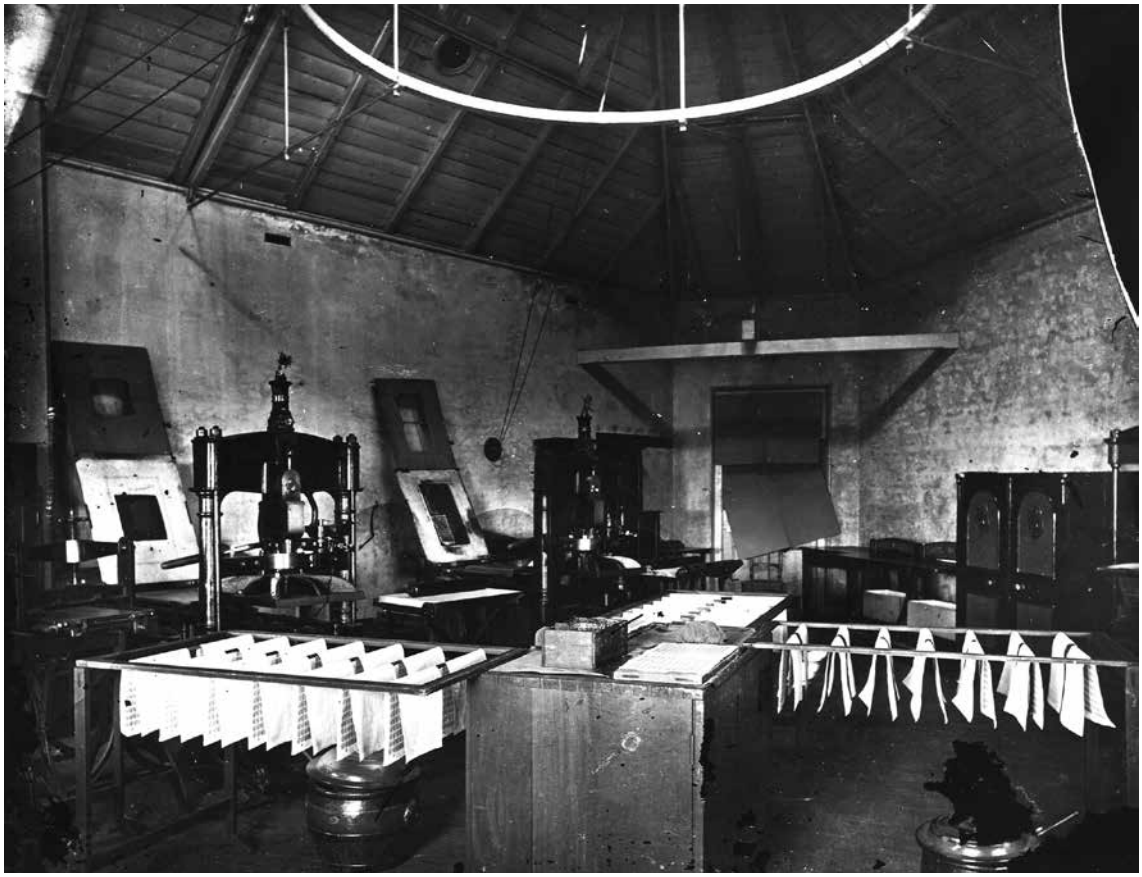

Fig. 29. **The stamp room at the old NSW Government Printing Office, 1874**, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 05239. With thanks to Richard Peck for the print.

augmented by additions and renovations.[25] Written accounts of the Government Printing Office in the nineteenth century describe an institution that was almost always in need of more space.[26] Its buildings were cramped, lacked appropriate ventilation and the fire risks were high. The character of the old printing office buildings was of a hodgepodge accrual of materials over time: exposed light-bulbs hung low, ceilings were equipped with chains, pulleys and metal girders and floors covered with a patchwork of wooden and metal surfaces. Such buildings had seemingly evolved with ad-hoc alterations over time; they were not rigorously planned in a systematic manner.

[25] 'The old Government Printing Office' (1947) *Staff Journal*, vol. 1., no. 1, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, p. 3; W.A. Gullick (1916), *History of the Government Printing Office*, New South Wales Government Printing Office, Government Printer, Sydney, pp. 3–5. Peck states: 'Alterations to the buildings were made in the following years: 1869 to the two storey building, 1871 Phillip and Bent St corner block became three storeys, 1873 northern extensions, 1875 third storey added to bindery, 1877 third storey added to the Phillip St section plus others in 1880, 1883, 1897 and the inclusion of premises occupied by the Scottish Australian Company from 1939.' In the first decades of the twentieth century the Government Printing Office expanded into a number of other city buildings: No. 1 Branch at Liverpool Street in Haymarket, No. 2 Branch at Mountain and Kelly Streets in Ultimo, a store in Bridge Street in the CBD, and bulk paper storage in Shea's Creek. R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 24.

[26] W.A. Gullick, op. cit., pp. 3–5; 'Government Printing Office – Inadequate and ill-ventilated' (1911), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September, p. 5.

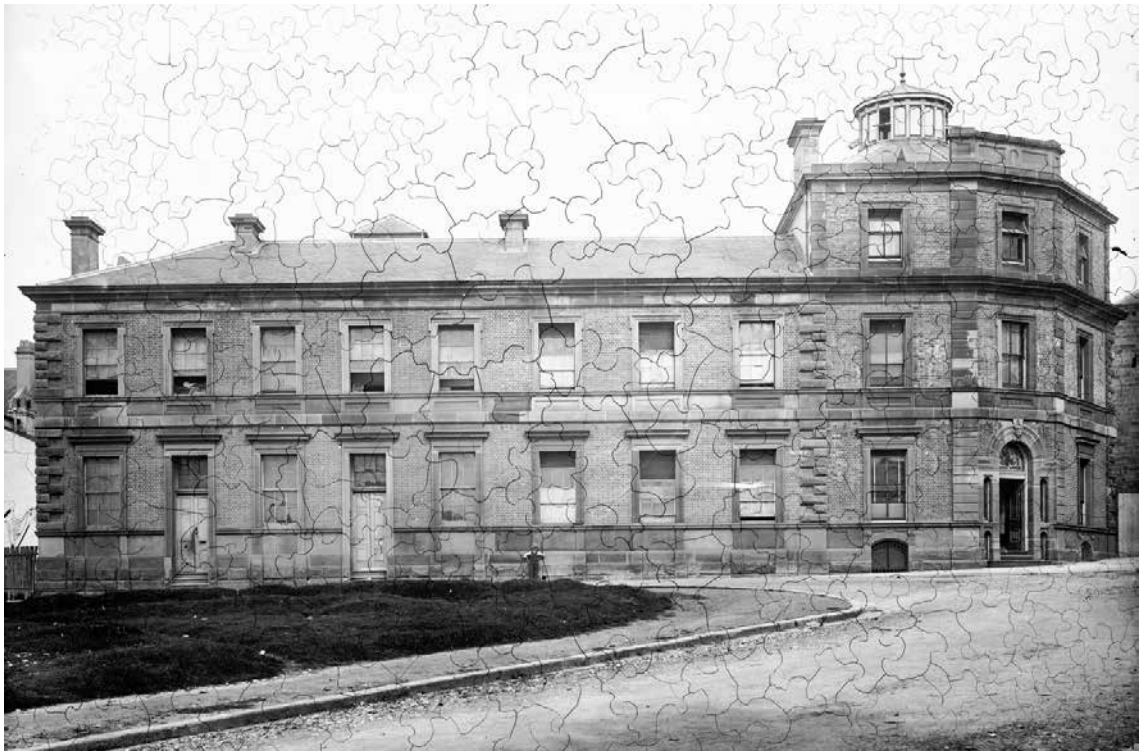

Fig. 30. **NSW Government Printing Office, Phillip and Bent streets, Sydney, c. 1870–1875**, by the American & Australasian Photographic Company, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. ON 4 Box 59 No 317.

A newspaper article from 1911 contained this assessment: 'the present building might be summed up as consisting of nooks and crannies'.[27] George Larden, a press-machinist who worked at the old printing office from 1932, described printing presses as being 'scattered all over the place'.[28] The aforementioned Victor Gunther, who started work at the Gov in 1946, said that the Printing Office at Phillip and Bent streets was the 'number one fire risk' in Sydney. He added, 'Smoking was not allowed, but the toilet was very popular for a quick puff.'[29]

The idea of centralising NSW government printing operations into one location was at the time considered an efficient and appropriate option. Governmental structure – and its palpable architectural expression – was still very much about the simple hierarchical organisation of multiple components; workers were seen to be single-skilled (they had one trade) or unskilled

[27] 'Government Printing Office – Inadequate and ill-ventilated', op. cit.

[28] George Larden, interview with author, 14 March 2013.

[29] Victor Gunther, interview with author, 15 August 2012.

(they had one repetitive menial task) and they needed to be corralled together in triangulated central arrangements. Such hierarchical systems were also to be expressed spatially.

Reconnaissance for suitable sites for the new Government Printing Office began in 1908, followed by an inquiry into the suitability of the existing building and possible alternatives in 1911.[30] The outbreak of World War I, the Depression and World War II all slowed progress with the Government Printing Office.[31] During the Depression the Department of Public Works' energy went into the creation of other, more affordable, public buildings to generate employment, such as schools and hospitals. A new printing office (and all the new equipment needed to fill it) was an expensive undertaking.[32] The then Government Architect, Cobden Parkes, described the harried state of affairs for government building design during the Depression:

> The Depression suddenly settled over the [Government Architects'] Office and a complete variation came about … almost overnight the emphasis was for plans to permit immediate employment rather than the normal work of proper design and working drawings … In the decisions to build, the priority were the buildings that could be commenced without delay. Often the foundations were excavated and the footings poured from original sketch plans, and the working drawings would follow. In some instances Hospital Boards were given a few days to accept or reject a new scheme prepared in a very preliminary form only … It was development at its very worst, but it was clearly recognised that the scheme to provide employment was paramount.[33]

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[30] R.C. Peck, op. cit., pp. 43, 47; 'Government Printing Office – Inadequate and ill-ventilated', op. cit., p. 5.

[31] NSW Government Printing Office, Annual Reports to the Public Service Board, 1949–1959, held at NSW State Records, NSW GPO General Correspondence Files, #18/2051. See also VCN Blight's address at the opening of the NSW Government Printing Office, 23 February 1959, transcript in the Government Printing Office *Staff Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, March, pp. 4–6.

[32] In 1939, provisional plans were drawn up to redesign the Government Printing Office but to keep it in-situ at Phillip and Bent streets. Although this project did not go ahead, the plans drawn up for this renovation are still held with NSW State Records and are in the process of being digitised. Incredibly detailed hand-drawn plans exist, showing the 1939 configuration of the Government Printing Office (and branches), and the ideal planned renovation, which never went ahead. See NSW State Records, Sydney, #SR Plans 1000–1019, dated 1939. These plans are so detailed that individual machines and furnishings are listed.

[33] Cobden Parkes, unpublished memoirs, held at the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Sydney, MLMSS 8622 Box 1, p. 150.

This description goes some way to explaining the slow completion of the Printing Office building (and other public works during this period).

In 1944 a site in Ultimo was finally selected.[34] It was on Harris Street, between Fig and Quarry streets, and looked out towards the Darling Harbour railway yards and beyond that to Sydney city. For most of the twentieth century, Ultimo and its neighbouring suburb Pyrmont were industrial, inner-city slum areas, where the land was cheaper than in Sydney's CBD. Ultimo and Pyrmont had a number of taller industrial buildings – such as woolstores, a sugar refinery, a tall garbage incinerator and a power station – and so the concept of building a large industrial plant of five to seven storeys was seen as appropriate for this location. At the time, Ultimo was only about ten minutes by car from State Parliament in Macquarie Street in the CBD.

Fig. 31 **View north along Harris Street, Ultimo, 1939**, courtesy the City of Sydney Archives, Sydney Reference Collection, file #032/032973, citation SRC6565, originally part of CRS 44/256. The site of the new Government Printing Office building is the vacant lot on the right.

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[34] The State Government owned this site from 1926. In the early nineteenth century the site may have been used as part of a quarry, and in the latter part of the that century the site was home to numerous shops and houses. Most of those buildings had been demolished by 1949, and the ground left vacant, walled off from the public. Land titles: 'Most of the land on the peninsula was granted to Doctor John Harris or purchased by him except for the land on the north-eastern section of the peninsula that was granted initially to Thomas Jones in 1795, then sold to Obidah Ilkin in 1796, who resold it to John Macarthur in 1799.' – Casey & Lowe Associates (1998), *Archaeological assessment: GPO / AML&F sites, Harris & Pyrmont streets, Ultimo*, City West Development Corporation, Sydney, p. 13.

George Bryant grew up on the Pyrmont-Ultimo borderline and worked as a despatch offsider in the Government Printing Office from 1959 to 1961. George's recollection of the construction site gives some insight into the way the arrival of the Printing Office may have changed Ultimo. The following extended passage is from an interview session that used several photographs (some of which were provided by George himself). The interplay of past and present tense in George's language is notable:

> George: Right there <points at Fig. 33> was the hugest Morton Bay fig [tree] you've ever seen. <pause> Oh it's enormous! You can see the pub across here, the Wentworth Park Hotel, and the roots of it went into the [pub] site. <pause> The first thing I see was: they moved these big packing cases in. And I don't remember the houses that used to be there, that was before my time. But they moved these huge packing crates in there, and everyone was, 'what's goin' on?', you know? ... Oh, you know, it was the talk of the place. Everyone used to say, 'what's in them packing crates?', you know? Apparently it was machinery or that type of somethin'.

Fig. 32 **Site of the new Government Printing Office, Ultimo, 1950**, before the removal of the fig trees. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 07729.

Jesse: ... Did you ever play in that space?

George: No. It was always fenced off, as far as I can remember. We used to come up here to get the tram. There was no buses and I used to get the tram. And everyone used to head for there because there was shade under the fig tree. <pause> None of the other stops had shade.

Jesse: ...Was [the Government Printing Office building] mostly welcomed, when they were building it?

George: Not at the start. <laughs> You know, 'cos everyone was really cheesed off about losing that tree! Oh, that was a talkin' part of the district for ages. You know. That was the only shade we had ...

Jesse: And when the Printing Office was built, did that feel like it changed the area quite a bit? I mean, you would have only been a kid …

George: Yeah. Brought more work into the area, and it brought a more diverse type of work too, because <pause> round there, everyone who lived in that area either worked in a woolstore, they worked on the wharves, they worked on the council <pause> some worked at CSR up the top of Pyrmont ... But when the Government Printers come there, it brought a more <pause> how would you say? A few more opportunities. Different kind of work. There were very few people round there that were qualified to do a lot of the work in there.[35]

Archival photographs from 1939 to 1950 show two conjoined fig trees on the western edge of the site. [Figs. 31–32] At the construction site, the first sod of earth was turned on 13 September 1950 and the fig trees were removed.[36] [Fig. 33] Construction, however, did not commence until March 1955. For five years, the Ultimo community missed the desirable

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[35] George Bryant, interview with author, 28 September 2012.

[36] A.H. Pettifer (1957), *New Government Printing Office New South Wales*, promotional pamphlet, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney. See photographic records of Government Printer Alfred Pettifer addressing a crowd, turning the first sod, on site in Ultimo on 13 September 1950, State Library of NSW, image ref #d1 – 07723, http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemDetailPaged.aspx?itemID=170313. See also R.C. Peck, op. cit., pp. 43, 47.

shade provided by the fig tree and the ostensible reason for its removal was unclear to them.[37] Development approval for the new Government Printing Office building was 'inadvertently not sought' and approval was finally given only in 1956.[38] The whole enterprise was more complex than anybody had anticipated. Continuing shortages of building materials and labour hampered progress. Added to this, there were engineering problems. During construction, a deep fissure was discovered in the subsoil at the south-west corner of the site and engineers bridged the gap over this fissure with large diagonal beams.[39] In an indication of the slowness of NSW Public Works to recover after the War, historian Peter Tyler has noted that the new NSW Government Printing Office building was 'the first major departmental building erected in the metropolitan area for 30 years'.[40]

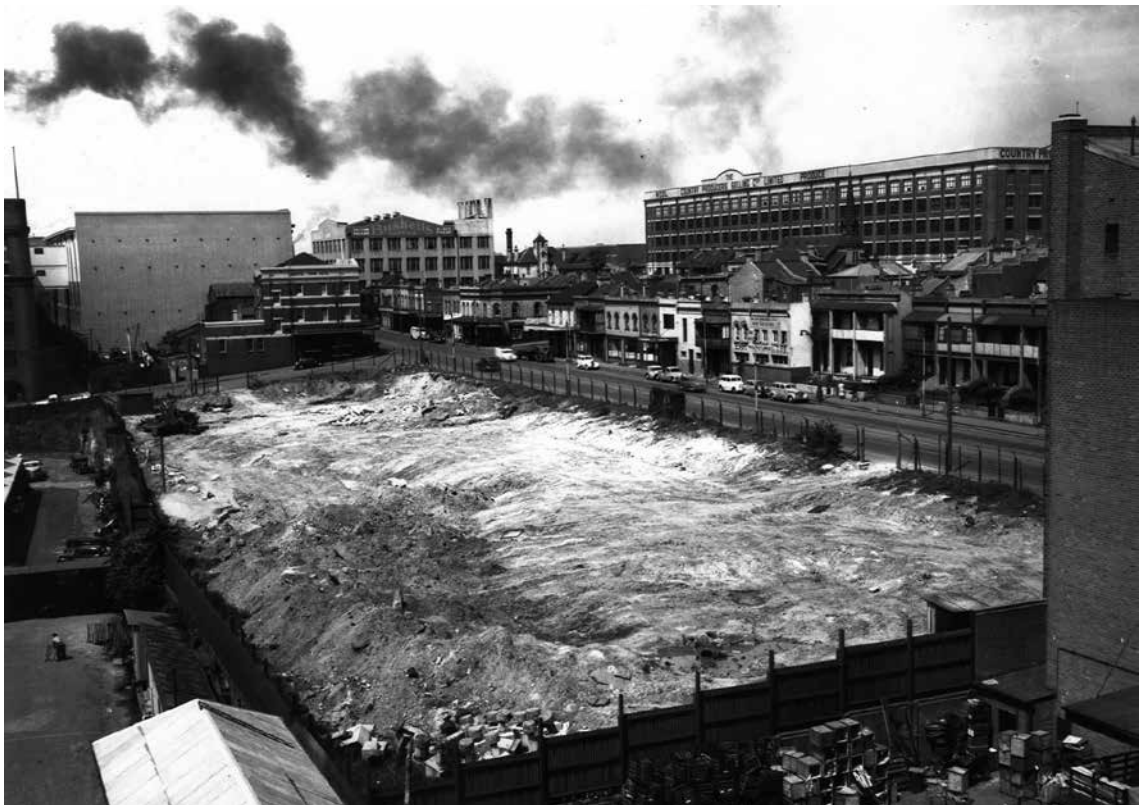

Fig. 33 **Site preparation for the new Government Printing Office building, Ultimo, 1951**. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 07712. With thanks to Geoff Hawes for the print.

[37] City of Sydney Archives: 390–422 Harris St Ultimo, File #0034/51.

[38] Letter from C.E. Jenkins to the County Clerk, Cumberland City Council, 26 April 1956, in City of Sydney Archives, 390–422 Harris St Ultimo, file no. 337/56.

[39] In this section, bedrock was located at a depth of 16.8 metres. For the rest of the site, bedrock was located at 7.6 metres. A retaining wall also had to be built under Harris Street to prevent the clay subsoil from shifting. A.H. Pettifer, op. cit., p. 8; 'New printing office cost £2.5m' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 25. The latter article plagarises Pettifer's publication.

[40] P. Tyler (2006), 'Building for the future', in *Humble and obedient servants: The administration of New South Wales*, vol. 2 (1901–1960), University of New South Wales Press and NSW State Records, Sydney, p. 202.

Printing Office staff finally began to move machinery and materials into the new building in November 1958. The move to Ultimo was a carefully considered affair:

> Scale plans of each floor were prepared and each piece of machinery, each bench, each table – everything – had its place on the plan.[41]

While this sort of system suggests that the Printing Office was organised and efficient, it also indicates that it was an institution very much fixed in its ways, led by VCN Blight, a Government Printer who perhaps could not imagine just how much the Printing Office would need to transform its operations in future decades. It is easy enough for us to say this in hindsight. Nonetheless, Blight's approach was very rigid: it was as if these marked-out places on the plan were fixed, the physical office imagined in terms of solidity and longevity.

Former press-machinist Ray Utick experienced the move in 1958 from the old building to the new structure on Harris Street.

> First time we saw it <pause> it felt big. Like, everything was new … They gradually brought everything over to Ultimo … It's <pause> cleaner ... it was more laid out correctly, nice and meticulously laid out ... all the big machines on one side of the building, the smaller machines on the other side … It was like heaven, then, the new one, compared to the old one.[42]

Ray recalled how a set of new Heidelberg cylinder letterpress machines were installed in the new building and he was one of the printers assigned to these new machines. He and the other 'lucky' printers were given new, crisp white overalls with the name 'Heidelberg' embroidered on the back (Ray still owns his pair). He and the other Heidelberg cylinder press-machinists were sent to work on these new machines, even before the lighting and air-cooling system had been fully connected. Working on night shift in such conditions was farcical, as Ray explains:

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41 'No hitches in big removal' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26.

42 Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

When I went over there, the first time I went over there, we worked overtime that night. Of course, there was no lights working. So as soon as the sun went down, you stopped and went home. <chuckles>[43]

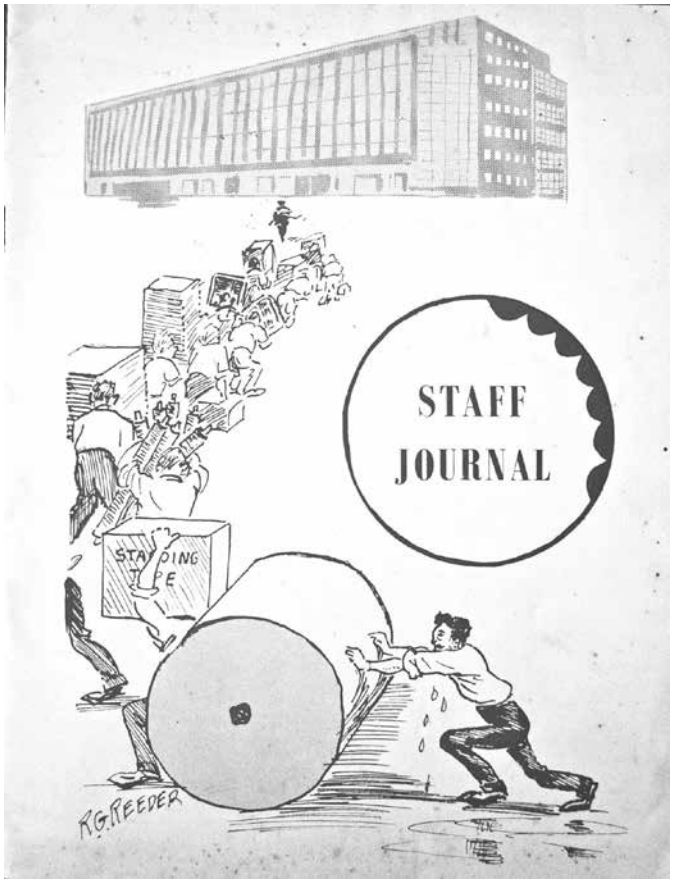

Fig. 34 **The move of paper, machinery and people to the new building in Ultimo, 1958.** Illustration by R.G. Reeder, cover of the 1958 Government Printing Office *Staff Journal,* March 1958.

Fig. 35 **Government Printing Office staff inspect the almost-complete third floor of the new building, 1958.** Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

[43] ibid.

Fig. 36 **Premier J. J. Cahill and Government Printer Victor Charles Nathaniel Blight inspect the newly opened Government Printing Office building, 23 February 1959**. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 13274.

Once all the machinery was installed, the new Government Printing Office building was officially opened by Premier John Cahill on 23 February 1959, more than 50 years after calls for a new building were first made.[44] The relocation of the Printing Office from its grim nineteenth-century quarters into a purpose-built, modern plant signified, in some ways, a belated transition into the twentieth century, although it was not long before the Printing Office again found itself 'out of its time'.

The new building was a purpose-built structure designed under the supervision of the aforementioned NSW Government Architect Cobden Parkes (1892–1978, Government Architect 1935–1958).[45] Parkes was known for his relatively conservative style and also for his

[44] Government Printer VCN Blight wrote to the Secretary of Public Works on 3 May 1960 complaining that the building was in fact still incomplete. NSW State Records B Files, Series 4351, Item B1596/3, file #10/3030. Premier Cahill may have had a particular interest in this project, as he was Minister for Public Works from 1944, when the site was approved.

[45] Cobden Parkes was the son of Henry Parkes, although Henry died when Cobden was around four years old.

interest in the Dutch modernist architect Willem Marinus Dudok.[46] As noted earlier, post-war building material shortages were a significant hindrance on public works in Australian cities and steel was not readily available.[47] The problem was so acute that Parkes travelled to the United Kingdom in 1950 to research alternative building materials.[48] Without steel for structural support, the Printing Office is a veritable industrial bunker of pre-cast concrete blocks. It takes up the entire length of the block on Harris Street – the frontage is 143.3 metres long and the building 37.5 metres high.[49]

In my discussions with interview participants about the Gov's building, one idea that I frequently encountered (expressed in a slightly different manner each time) was that the building was originally based on plans for a hospital. Seven interview participants discussed the hospital idea, although the matter was consigned to rumour and conjecture. For example, former compositor Neil Lewis said, 'I believe it was designed as a hospital',[50] while former compositor George Woods was more specific, explaining: 'They wanted a quick plan, so they took it off the dental hospital'.[51] Former Government Printer Don West narrated the story further:

> It had been designed as a hospital … I only know this from reading some records of the Printing Office I found in the place. Public Works pulled out a drawer, found a building that had enough floor-space, which turned out to be a hospital, and put it up on that site. But they did a wonderful job with it.[52]

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[46] As Government Architect, Cobden Parkes was also known to give free reign to staff architect E.H. Rembert, so it remains unclear who exactly designed the building, as collaborative work and anonymity was the lot of a government architect. P. Reynolds (2000), 'Parkes, Cobden (1892–1978)', *Australian dictionary of biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/parkes-cobden-11342/text20257, visited 26 June 2012.

[47] Cobden Parkes, unpublished memoirs, held at the State Library of NSW, Sydney, MLMSS 8622 Box 1, p. 192; 'Modern government printing office nearing completion' (1958), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January, p. 11.

[48] C. Parkes, unpublished memoirs, op. cit., p. 195.

[49] The building's height was modified in the early twenty-first century.

[50] Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

[51] George Woods, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

[52] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

Notwithstanding this anecdotal evidence, official documentation and news clippings related to the NSW Government Printing Office always describe the Printing Office as being a purpose-built structure designed by Cobden Parkes.[53]

There may still be some merit to the hospital rumour. In 1938, Parkes was in hospital recovering from a hernia operation. While there he read in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the Minister for Health, Lt. Herbert Fitzsimons, would be making a world tour to study hospital development and that he, as Government Architect, would accompany him, to study hospital design and construction.[54] In July 1939 Parkes and Fitzsimons indeed left Australia on the maiden voyage of the *RMS Orcades* and their grand tour covered France, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, the United States and Canada, visiting hospitals in major cities.[55] As a result of the tour, a publication was produced featuring Fitzsimons' detailed descriptions and Parkes' architectural drawings of European and American hospitals.[56] These modern buildings had novel amenities such as fluorescent lighting, sparse and spacious interiors, large glass windows, easy-to-clean skirting boards and wide corridors. Spaces were compartmentalised and separated, with separate rooms leading off large central corridors. The spaces appeared open and bright, due to internal windows spanning the upper half of the walls on the corridor sides.

In my archival research I did not find conclusive evidence that the Printing Office building was a direct copy of any particular European hospital.[57] I can say, however, that the 1939 health tour was influential in a number of NSW Public Works' post-war buildings in Sydney, such as the

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[53] See for example Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office New South Wales*, op. cit.; 'Sydney improved, says Government Architect' (1958), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August, p. 5.

[54] Cobden Parkes, unpublished memoirs, op. cit., p. 162; 'NSW Minister's Tour' (1938), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December, p. 11; 'To investigate hospitals abroad, NSW Health Minister on way to London' (1939), *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 3 March, p. 26.

[55] Parkes and Fitzsimons visited Hamburg, Berlin, Potsdam and Dresden in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. The Parkes manuscript boxes at the SLNSW contain Nazi memorabilia collected on this trip. When examining these materials, there was a disturbing moment at the Mitchell Library when I pulled a piece of fabric out of an unmarked envelope and realised that I was holding a Nazi flag aloft in the Manuscripts section.

[56] H.P. Fitzsimons (1940), *Report of inquiries and investigations made into health and hospital administration during a visit to the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada and the United States of America*, NSW Ministry for Health, Sydney.

[57] The plans of the Government Printing Office building are available on microfilm with the NSW Department of Finance and Services.

NSW Maritime Services Board building at Circular Quay. Other tours were taken by relevant authorities after the Second World War, specifically to examine modern printing establishments in the United Kingdom and the United States, and so it does not make sense to over-emphasise the influence of hospital design.[58] What is more significant is the way in which the same principles of cleanliness, efficiency, transparency and compartmentalisation applied equally to health as to industry in the post-war period.

Moreover, it is worth observing how notions such as 'it was a hospital' can circulate in oral history participants' spoken recollections; these are architectural rumours, embellished and oft-repeated, gaining and losing complexity with the passing of time. The hospital concept has become embedded in the mnemonic spatial projections and workplace folklore at the Gov. This rumour, in and of itself, is arguably just as integral to the history of the Government Printing Office building as are other more factually assured aspects about it.

The design of the new Printing Office consisted of five storeys, with an additional two basements making use of its sloping site. Promotional material about the new building was released in 1957, a 15-page booklet filled with facts and statistics about the building, listed in immense detail.[59] For example, the booklet boasts that the building process involved the pouring of 15,291 cubic metres of concrete.[60] The structure of the building was in three sections – the centre of seven bays and the north and south sections each both eight bays across. The ceilings on the first and third floors were relatively high, to provide room for tall presses and other large equipment. The building's construction in pre-cast concrete meant that columns were needed for structural support, rather than providing clear spans of space, which would have been more convenient for a large factory.[61] The facade of the building – facing Harris Street – featured vertical concrete fins, rising from the first floor to the top of the building, and the southern corner of the

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[58] NSW Government Printing Office (1947) *Annual Report to the Public Service Board*, held at NSW State Records, NSW GPO General Correspondence Files, #18/2051.

[59] A.H. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office*, op. cit.

[60] ibid., p. 5. In more recent years, building's sheer mass has acted as a disincentive for those who might have considered demolishing it; it would cost a lot to make it disappear. – Personal communication with Global Switch Sydney CEO Mark O'Brien, 30 January 2012.

[61] 60.96 x 60.96cm, spaced 6.1m apart. A.H. Pettifer, op. cit., p. 8.

Fig. 37 **The new Government Printing Office in Ultimo, c. 1960s**, photograph by John Cusack, reproduced with permission.

building featured a rounded corner, clad in slate blue ceramic tiles (a feature considered to provide some aesthetic relief from the hardness of the building).[62]

Following the building's official opening, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a three-page special on the event.[63] NSW Premier John Joseph Cahill opened the new building, declaring in his speech:

> I believe that in creating a magnificent building such as this, Labor[64] has built a monument to literacy and democracy, both of which have been able to flourish in the era of the printing press.[65]

At first, the renewed Government Printing Office was seen as a modern marvel; it could boast of spacious, organised and hygienic workspaces.[66] The Government Printing Office *Staff Journal*, commemorating the opening of the new building in 1959, [Fig. 39] is full of florid language and over-enthusiasms about the way in which the new building will assist with the health and efficiency of the Gov's workers:

> Shades of Caxton! Yes – but how far removed from the epoch that emerged when the new Printing Establishment, with which this journal is largely concerned, was opened. Creative giant though he was – did he in

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[62] The vertical fins were the subject of some commentary. In 1957, in a booklet advertising the as-yet-incomplete Government Printing Office, the fins were described as having a threefold function: 'Although its design is conceived along generally conventional lines, the threefold function of the vertical concrete fins along the Harris Street facade represents an interesting departure. They provide the aesthetic appeal necessary in the architecture of any building, and in this respect are in line with the growing tendency to use such fins for both protection from direct sunlight and as an architectural feature. But their function does not cease here. They are, in fact, structurally necessary in that they are responsible for carrying the floor loads through the columns.' – A.H. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office*, op. cit., p. 7. See also 'Ceramic veneer facing' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald (Homes and Building)*, 24 February, p. 25. In 2013 the ceramic tiles were removed by the present occupiers of the building, after years of problems with falling tiles. The corner was re-clad with terracotta tiles, similar to the rest of the building's current cladding. As a result, there is little exterior cladding that can be connected to the original building, however the overall expression of the building's form (on the Harris Street side) remains the same.

[63] 'Premier opens printing office' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 11; 'New printing office cost £2.5m' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 25; 'Office is 118 years old' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 27; 'Service for citizen's lifetime' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26; 'No hitches in big removal' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26; ' "Father of the press" was a Creole' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 27; 'New plant cuts costs' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 26; 'Ceramic veneer facing' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald (Homes and Building)*, 24 February, p. 25.

[64] This refers to the NSW Labor party.

[65] J. J. Cahill, Premier and Colonial Treasurer of New South Wales, speech at the opening of the new building for the NSW Government Printing Office, 23 February 1959, Sydney. Speech transcript published in the *Staff Journal*: *Souvenir of the Official Opening*, 1959, vol. 12, no. 1, March, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney. See also 'Premier opens printing office' (1959), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, p. 11.

[66] For a detailed description of the new printing office building, see A.H. Pettifer, *New Government Printing Office*, op. cit.

> his humble efforts ever envisage such progress as culminated at Ultimo? … In our new palatial surroundings let us hope that the noble traditions of the Printing Office will go forward in the atmosphere of congeniality and spirit of camaraderie so well founded in the Old Office.[67]

The onward progression of printing technology – from Gutenberg and Caxton to 1959 – is tied to the exalted status of the new Printing Office building. In 1959 the Gov was said to be the largest printing plant in the Southern Hemisphere.[68]

Fig. 38 **Photographic section at morning-tea time, 1964**, by staff photographers. Courtesy of Graeme Murray, reproduced with permission. This is a photograph taken by the Gov's staff for unofficial purposes (possibly a practice shot, or a bit of artistry on the side). See Chapter Nine for a discussion of unofficial creative practices at the Gov.

[67] M. Culhane (1959), 'Editorial', *Staff Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, NSW Government Printing Office, March, p. 1. (Original caps retained.)

[68] D. Hartridge (1982), 'State government printing offices in Australia today', *Government Publications Review*, vol. 9, p. 374.

Fig. 39 **Cover of the *Staff Journal*, 1959**, commemorating the official opening of the new Government Printing Office building in Ultimo.

The contrast between the gleaming new Printing Office and other factory spaces in Sydney was stark. The aforementioned Alan Leishman was apprenticed in photo-etching and engraving in 1955[69] and moved into the new building in the early 1960s. In the following quote, Alan holds himself at an interpretive distance from other attitudes to the Printing Office building, using terms such as 'seen as':

> Each area had its particular section. It was seen as being very modern … the place was built like a World War II bunker. It's not steel frame … And the ceilings were enormously high in some sections … I think for what it was originally it worked well. It was solid. It stood up well. Had good lighting. It had good facilities. Yeah. Compared to what we worked in – compared to Liverpool Street – it was bliss! It was bliss. Liverpool Street was a really old dungeony thing up on top, on the fifth floor, and oh, it was shocking! It was more like a tin shed building, it wasn't particularly good at all. Partitioned off. Sections here and sections there. Quite amazing.[70]

Alan makes it clear that the heavy, reassuring concrete solidity of the building was significant.

Despite the Gov being designed as a rigorously 'functional' modernist structure, there were many elements of its design that were rather dysfunctional and made work physically difficult. Oral testimony suggests (and archival evidence confirms)[71] that despite the claims about the fins providing sun protection, the westerly side of the building became very hot in the afternoon and Venetian blinds did little to cool it down. Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville, who worked at the Gov in the 1960s, recalled:

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[69] Alan Leishman worked in the Liverpool Street Branch of the old NSW Government Printing Office, in Haymarket, Sydney.

[70] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[71] Letter from R.A. Johnson, Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia (PIEUA) to the Under Secretary and Comptroller of Accounts, NSW Treasury, 30 November 1959: 'It should be emphasised that the ventilation system installed does not supply cooled air. During summer months air is drawn to the system by fans at outside temperature. The quantity of air supplied is adequate but the temperature in the building, particularly during the last summer rose because of the heavy electrical loads in the building and the large heat gain through the eastern and western glass areas.' NSW State Records, B Files, Series 4351, item B1596/3, File #10/3030.

> Because it was open in '59 or something, but they didn't air-condition the place. But it got really hot in summer, it was unbelievably hot. Especially in the Mono – in the casting room, where they're casting molten lead, and in the Lino room. It was just incredibly stifling.[72]

Letterpress printer Norm Rigney explained that the intake ducts for the air-cooling system were on the eastern side of the building, adjacent to the Darling Harbour Goods Yard. He cheerfully explained that the soot was sucked into the building and distributed:

> The air-conditioning, of course, it used to suck in all of the 'fresh air' <sarcasm> from the back of the building, and there was an air-conditioning room in the ground floor, which was up in the top corner. And it used to suck it all in, but down the back was Darling Harbour Railway Goods Yard, and the steam engines used to *phht pphht phht phht* past, and all the smoke used to get sucked up through the intakes. And of course you'd get the smell of the steam engines. It never ever bothered me, because I loved trains.[73]

The meanings attached to the Government Printing Office building are fluid and they changed dramatically in the three decades that the building functioned as a printing factory. In the late 1950s and 1960s this solid, chunky building was a form of modern democracy in action. It was respected for its technological displays of efficiency, reliability, trustworthiness and governmental authority. The space itself seemed to say, 'We value your work.' Workers were not always convinced, however, and they revelled in telling stories of how things were wrong with the building. Ray Utick emphasised that the windows often leaked, because they were installed 'back to front', and he and George Larden claimed that the building itself shook from the movement of their presses:

> George: That was one big mistake they made with our heavy machinery
>
> *Ray: Yeah, sitting on wooden blocks.*
>
> **Jesse: Why was that a mistake?**

[72] Lindsay Somerville, interview with author, 15 December 2011.

[73] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012.

George: Well the mistake came when they poured the floor, and put the bolts in for the machine, uh … then they put the blocks on and that meant the blocks had to be longer <pause> now, instead of a bolt say, that high, it had to be about that high. And the more height you get, the greater the leverage, and when you've got tonnes of stuff going backwards and forwards, reversing in the back, like the GMAs, the whole machine went UUGH UUGH UUGH!

Ray: Into the same sequence: the whole building!

George: I was up on the fifth floor one day, and I said to the bloke, 'Do you feel alright?' he said, 'Yes, I'm alright.' I said, 'But I feel a big giddy or something, something is moving.' He said, 'Yes, it's the building!' <laughs>

Ray: One machine'd be ok, but when you get about six or seven, they slowly catch up to each other, get the same movement back and forward. That's when the building used to move.[74]

By the 1970s and 1980s the Gov was an anxious space; a site of rumour, dysfunction and multiple, conflicting mini-worlds. Industrial disputes and strikes were common in the 1970s, which meant that the boundaries of the Gov were picketed. In this climate, the doorways, driveways and despatch areas took on completely different significance.[75] Some doorways were even fictional, as the following example explains.

One building-based narrative that emerged from several oral history interviews was the story of the 'Mad Men's Exit'. As workers Sandra Elizabeth Stringer and Neil Lewis separately recalled, in the 1980s the Gov attempted to improve its wheelchair accessibility. This involved the installation of a ramp along the side of the building, but it was a botched job that ultimately

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[74] George Larden and Ray Utick, interview with author, 14 March 2013.

[75] See for example 'Printers stay on strike' (1978), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September, p. 13; 'Strike row as ballot papers are moved' (1978), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October, p. 2; 'Tally room shifted' (1978), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October, p. 2.

seemed to symbolise all that was wrong with the assumed inefficiencies and dull-headedness of the public service. According to an oft-told anecdote, the ramp contractors were looking at the building plans upside-down and so they installed the accessibility ramp on the wrong side of the building, where there was no door, only a massive brick wall. Sandra explains:

> I always remember the Mad Man's exit, when they put in the disability ramp on the wrong side of the building. It's still there I think. There's a ramp that goes up there. Somehow the contractors came along and had the plan upside down, you can go have a look at it, the ramp goes nowhere! One of the guys from the night engineers went down there with a tub of paint and he painted a door on the outside, and above it he wrote 'Mad Man's exit'. <laughs>[76]

Neil Lewis also remembered this prank, associating it specifically with the long-term eccentric 'characters' working at the Gov:

> I always remember on the outside, as well, near where the Western Distributor goes now, someone had painted like a little doorway, just three lines, and it just said 'Mad Men Only'. And it used to make me laugh every time I seen it, because I thought, oh, that's quite appropriate. <laughs>[77]

Subsequent examination of archival photographs has confirmed that Neil and Sandra's recollections are based on fact; up until the renovation of the building in 2012, there was indeed a ramp leading to a blank wall and a drawn-on door on the wall, with the words 'Mad Men Only'. [Figs. 40 and 41]

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[76] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[77] Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

Figs 40–41 **Exterior (and detail) of the Government Printing Office building, 1985**, looking south down Harris Street, Ultimo, showing the ramp and the 'For mad men only' graffiti. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 40363. In Fig. 41 the spray-painted door is faintly visible above the vehicle.

This offers an example of how oral history anecdotes can be confirmed by the existence of archival photographs. We do not know the precise circumstances surrounding how and why the ramp was installed incorrectly, but in many senses that does not matter. What matters is the way in which the building's foibles came to be seen as the embodiment of the Gov's dysfunction and also its loveability. There was a paradoxical relationship that workers had with their institution; their workplace was the subject of derision (and so was the building). The Gov's walls enclosed a world of complaint and discontent and yet the Gov was also home. This workplace was, for many workers, a building they knew intimately and it was deeply embedded in their identity and everyday experience. The institution, and the clunky modernist building that housed it, were one and the same.

Order and memory

The modern architecture of the Printing Office building can also be understood in relation to what architectural theorist Reinhold Martin calls an 'organisational complex'.[78] In an attempt to provide an alternative framework for understanding modernist corporate architecture in the United States, Martin characterises modernist architecture as a 'conduit' for social and power relations and, more significantly, sees architecture as an agent within what he calls an organisational network.[79] Martin argues that both the image and the lived reality of architecture participate as an organising and representational force within a network of human-machine relations.[80] The presumed transparency and simplicity of modernist architecture worked to naturalise and shape the organisational processes and social hierarchies held within.[81]

Although the architecture of the Government Printing Office is quite a different sort of modernism to the international style skyscrapers that capture Martin's attention, similar

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[78] R. Martin (2003), *The organizational complex: Architecture, media, and corporate space*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

[79] ibid., p. 4.

[80] ibid., pp. 3–13.

[81] ibid., p. 4.

principles can be applied. The hierarchical system of modern organisation expressed through the Gov's structure functioned as a physical representation of, as well as an active player within, its socio-technical and spatial relations.

The order of the floors of the Printing Office directly represented the various phases of the letterpress printing process. The design of the building was intended to allow a flow of activities from the top (fifth) floor down through the building to despatch in the basement.[82] Accordingly, the top floor held the Government Printer's office, administrative staff, a canteen and a library. In later decades the outdoor area on the fifth floor was improved to provide a BBQ area and a netball court. The fourth floor was chiefly dedicated to the composition process, with a Linotype room, a Monotype room, a space for Monotype casters, stereotyping, ticket-printing and metal melting. It also housed the Parliamentary Room, the Confidential Room and the Reading Room with small conveyor belts for transferring proofs. These were all distinct rooms coming off a central corridor. This was the floor that, to begin with, had 18 Linotype machines, 12 Monotype keyboards and 16 Monotype casters. Once 'hot metal' had been phased out, the third and fourth floors were home to computer typesetting and office areas.

Level three was dedicated to the Main Pressroom (on the northern side) and the General Composing Room and Jobbing Room, for hand-composition and imposition (on the southern side). After 1984 the third floor was also home to a computer section for electronic typesetting using the Penta system and other office areas.[83] Folding, guillotining and bookbinding were located on the second floor and this level also had a medical treatment room. The first floor featured block-making and lithographic plate preparation, as well as the lithographic printing section, photo-engraving and the manufacture of envelopes, exercise books and other stationery. The ground floor contained the main entrance and two staff entrances, paper storage, office space and a small shop for selling stationery and government publications.[84] The basement was used

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82 'New printing office cost £2.5m' op. cit., p. 25.

83 Valuer General's Department (1988) 'Valuation of the Government Printing Office, 390–422 Harris Street, Ultimo', Sydney, held at NSW State Records, NSW GPO General Correspondence Files, #18/2101.

84 See Chapter Seven for more detail on the significance of the renovations to the Gov's shop and front entrance.

for storage and also had a boiler room, a ventilation plant, oil fuel storage tanks and an electricity sub-station.

The spatial organisation of the Gov regularly weaved its way into my oral history interviews with former employees, often without my prompting. In fact, my specific questions about the building itself yielded less interesting results; this sometimes took the form of a fairly mundane listing of what was on each floor, the location of each particular section. What is significant, however, is the way in which interviewees, when describing the building, appeared to be mentally traveling through the space as they spoke. The interview with former Linotype operator Bob Law offers one example (of many similar statements). Recollections of more specific details fall in and out of Bob's description of 'what was where':

> Goin' round the building: opposite the Reading Room was the Stereotype room, where they used to get images and cast them and put them on wooden blocks. That was a pretty highly technical department to be in, but one of the first ones to disappear … There was that <pause> I'm going down the corridor. Next to that was the Parliamentary Room, I think, which was a composing room, but it also had its own printing presses in there. On the other side of the corridor was the Confidential Room, where all the ballot papers were done, all the <pause> what else <pause> School Examination papers, I did a few of them too, they were terrible. And the further down you got <pause> oh, they had all sorts of printing rooms down there and then opposite the very last room on the other side was the engineers. They had an engineers' section where they had electricians, plumbers and <pause> that sort of person workin' in there. But that was just on my floor. Of course the fifth floor was all administration.[85]

The structure of the building thereby replicated the printing process symbolically as well as functionally. The compartmentalisation of the Printing Office represented the starkly delineated

[85] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

printing trades – which because of industrial demarcation and union strength were staunchly separated (the principal aim being to protect jobs). The bulky, modernist solidity of the Printing Office also expressed a sense of permanence, a reassuring sign of stability after the upheavals of the first half of the century.

Similar to Bob's recollections of the building, former camera operator Terry Hagenhofer also took the listener on a journey through the Gov's spaces. He recounts a 'run-in' with an older apprentice compositor, Geoff Hawes (who was also interviewed in this project):

> The guys used to play table-tennis on the [imposition] slab (that's where you set it, where you used to lock all the jobs up) – so, morning tea-time, one of the big apprentices, big giant of a bloke, came up to me one day and he give me this money and he says,
> 'While you're over at the shop, can you get me a pie.'
> And I'm goin', 'I'm not goin' over to the shop!'
> And he says, 'While you're over at the shop, can you get me a pie.'
> I was p'd-off with that, thinkin', 'Oh, these buggers are making me go over.' So I've come back, and they're playing a game of table-tennis and I've put his pie right in the middle of the game. Anyway, this other guy I'd never met – ended up being Geoff Hawes – he says,
> 'Oh good on ya, you bloody little smart ass.' Then I said something to him, and he says, 'Mate, I oughta kick you fair up the ass.'
> And I said, 'Yeah if you can catch me!' 'cos he was a pretty big bloke, but I fancied myself as pretty nippy. Well, he's come at me, and I've taken off through the Composing Room, and he's chased me through the Press Room, and he's behind me all the way, and I couldn't get away. And I've run into the Font Room thinking I'm safe, and he's got hold of me – nothing rough – just <trails off>. Anyway, I disliked him for years.
> I dunno, I always used to think, 'Oh, that Geoff Hawes!' you know?
> And then five or six years later, we used to see each other in traffic on the

> way home on the Hume Higxhway. We were just chattin' one day, and he says, 'Do you wanna get a car-pool goin'?' He ended up being the nicest bloke.[86]

Terry's story is not only about the process of growing up, it also takes you through the third floor of the Gov at morning teatime. The act of recollecting is not only a re-living of particular memories, it also occurs as a specific mnemonic, spatial projection of an embodied experience.

Internally, the new Printing Office might have been modern, but it was modern in a compartmentalised, rigid fashion. The compartmentalisation of sections sometimes had the effect of keeping sections isolated, alienating different trades from one another. Graeme Murray explained his situation in this way. Graeme regularly used the spatial acknowledgement of 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' in his account:

> The sections were well-defined. The photographic section was completely separate from the litho printing section, it was only a double door to go into the litho section. We had to work with them constantly, we'd go back and forth all the time. But the other floors and the other sections were pretty much doing their own thing … But, you know, there was a separation of tasks. We'd work with the art department upstairs, because of the posters, maps and other things that they were doing, but we had very little to do with the letterpress, comps or binders.[87]

The spatial divisions within this large building also resulted in a labyrinthine quality. The term 'rabbit warren' was used repeatedly by several interviewees describing the building, notwithstanding the fact that it was designed as a modern, transparent and highly organised building. Sandra Elizabeth Stringer described the building as a place in flux, not fixed:

> It was a funny place, a bit of a rabbit-warren. Different places, different rooms … you're ducking down little funny sets of stairs and corridors … There were different areas and as different machines had come in, things

[86] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011.

[87] Graeme Murray, interview with author, 9 September 2011.

> had been tacked on, so it changed a lot. Different rooms'd spring up all the time … One of the things with the building … you were able to work out where Berdj [Momdjian, the Overseer] would be waiting for you and go in a different lift or through Despatch and end up coming down from the fifth floor. He'd always be left wondering what on earth was going on. <laughs>[88]

Philip James, who commenced as an apprentice compositor in 1976, described similar hideaway areas. His interview provides more insight into the exploratory attitude that some of the Gov's workers took to their building.

> There were other floors above, with myriad small rooms, water storage areas, nooks and crannies – lift shafts with iron ladders reaching up to more small rooms with windows, some with sweeping views of the city skyline. Out on the roof area itself, there were iron ladders leading up to small areas right on top of the lift shafts, where you could go to have lunch, sunbathe, or just hide away – you couldn't be seen by anyone up there.[89]

One feature of earlier factory design remained: supervisors were located in elevated 'boxes' – looking out over the factory floor, literally overseers of their domain below. [Fig. 42] Supervision was done by 'Overseers' and 'Leading Hands' (a tradition that continued throughout the Gov's history), and Overseers were positioned on elevated perches, over their workers – a spatial arrangement that continued in the new Printing Office building. Elevated overseers' boxes were a feature of the old Printing Office, and they persisted in the design of the new building. Philip describes them here:

> Each main Department on each floor had a raised platform or office in the middle, where the boss (or Overseer) would be seated, along with their second-in-charge, and also a secretary. The Overseer could see all around the room, and could sometimes be heard calling out if any shirking was noticed.[90]

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[88] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[89] Philip James, personal communication with author, 1 October 2013.

[90] ibid.

Overseers' boxes remained a feature of the Gov's factory spaces well into the 1980s. Sandra recounted that the raised platforms were still in use in the mid-1980s:

> Sandra: Oh, I hated working for an 'overseer'. Don't you worry about that. And I hated the fact, too, this is another building-related thing, but <pause> when you walked into the room, the office was, like, built on a raised platform.
>
> *Jesse: The overseer's office?*
>
> Sandra: Yeah, So, I just didn't like that.
>
> *Jesse: They are literally over-seeing, yeah. …*
>
> Sandra: I always found that really confronting.[91]

The inscribed hierarchy was thus emphasised spatially, a constant reminder of status and position.

Fig. 42 **View from an Overseer's box, General Composing Area, 1979**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 02744.

[91] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

Mapping factory stories

During the research process I developed my own fragmentary mental snapshots of the building between the years of 1959 and 1989. I can see the hanging fluorescent lights, the large glass windows and the load-bearing concrete pillars. In the first floor's photography section, down at the south-east end of the building, the windows were made of yellow glass and there were revolving doors to get into the dark rooms. Building upon the stories I have been told, I imagine that the base of the lift-wells in this building might still be filled with pieces of metal type; the result of many accidents where galley-trucks hit a bump on the way out of the lift. An upturned galley-truck resulted in smashed up formes all over the floor, destroying the made-up pages and sending metal slugs and individual letters tumbling down the lift-well. I can see how the afternoon sun from the west cast parallel lines of light through the Venetian blinds in the Main Pressroom and the General Composing Room. In the Font Room on the third floor, I can see the rough, grey piles of individual letters of type inside World War II ammunition boxes. In the bookbinding section on the second floor I see large tables stacked with law books bound in cream and red 'half-calf' leather and rolls of buckram and the hard edges of new guillotines bought in the early 1980s. Moving up to the fourth floor: I have not heard the sound of a room full of Monotype casters, or a room full of Linotype machines, but I know the noise level would be considerable. (Many of the Gov's workers suffered from industrial deafness, and earphones were not common in press-machining or in the composing rooms in the 1960s and 1970s.)

Former Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville described the sound of Monotype machines as: CHONK CHONK CHONK, every time you hit a character. CHONK CHONK. And then DING! at the end.[92] Alan Leishman recalled that the old letterpress machines at the Gov made a 'SCHHOOOONNNG CASHOOOUNG SCHOOOOONG' sort of sound.[93] Compositor George Woods described the sound of the Linotype machines in the 1960s:

[92] Lindsay Somerville, interview with author, 15 December 2011.

[93] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

> It would move the mould, this thing, the matrix, it would move that, bang bang bang! … Like, CLACK CLACK, it was like air, you know, CLACK-CLACK-CLACK-CLACK-CLACK! Just volumes! The walls weren't padded. It was just echoing, echoing. So, in later years everybody had earphones and things, but in those years no one had any.[94]

All this is to say that in my mind's eye I saw the Gov in section and I became aware that some of my participants had a similar way of expressing their spatial memories of the Gov. Polish sociologist Radoslaw Poczykowski uses Alfred Schutz's concept of *lebenswelt* (lifeworld) to discuss how people can reconstruct their lifeworld on paper, in 'graphic equivalents to oral history'.[95] Without prompting, Bob Law felt compelled to draw from memory a plan of the Linotype room on the fourth floor. In this way his memory of working at the Gov is articulated in a manner that is thoroughly, and almost systematically, spatial.

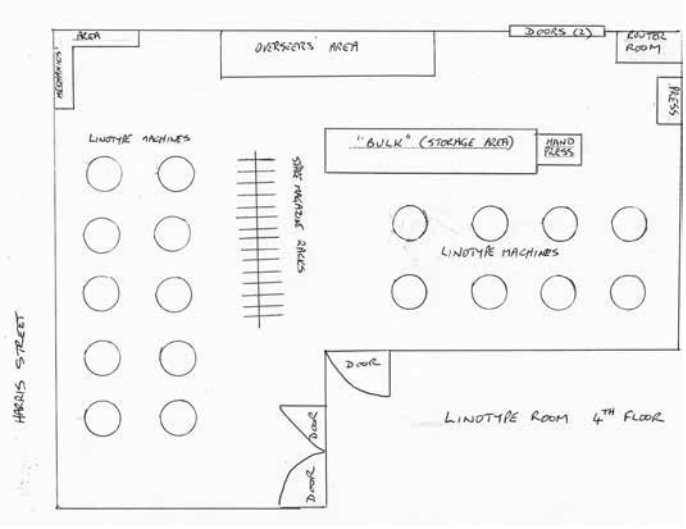

Fig. 43 **Bob Law, plan of the Linotype room, drawn from memory, 2013**. Courtesy of Bob Law, reproduced with permission.

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94 George Woods, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

95 R. Poczykowski (2010), 'Hand-drawn memory – How to read a mental map?', in W. Kalaga & M. Kubisz (eds), *Cartographies of culture: Memory, space, representation*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, pp. 42–45. See also P. Gould & R. White (1974), 'The images of places', in *Mental maps*, Pelican Books, Middlesex and Baltimore, pp. 15–50. Another example of oral history and spatial mapping exercises: historian Maria Nugent encouraged the literal 'mapping' of memories in her oral history interviews with Indigenous Australians. Her project had the specific aims of recovering spatial knowledge through Indigenous storytelling and map-making, and so its scope and content are vastly different to this project, which did not begin with the intention to plumb spatial memories, but rather, found them along the way. See: M. Nugent (2008), 'Mapping memories: Oral history in Aboriginal cultural heritage in New South Wales, Australia', in P. Hamilton & L. Shopes (eds), *Oral history and public memories*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, pp. 47–64; M. Nugent & D. Byrne (2004), *Mapping attachment: A spatial approach to post-contact heritage*, Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney.

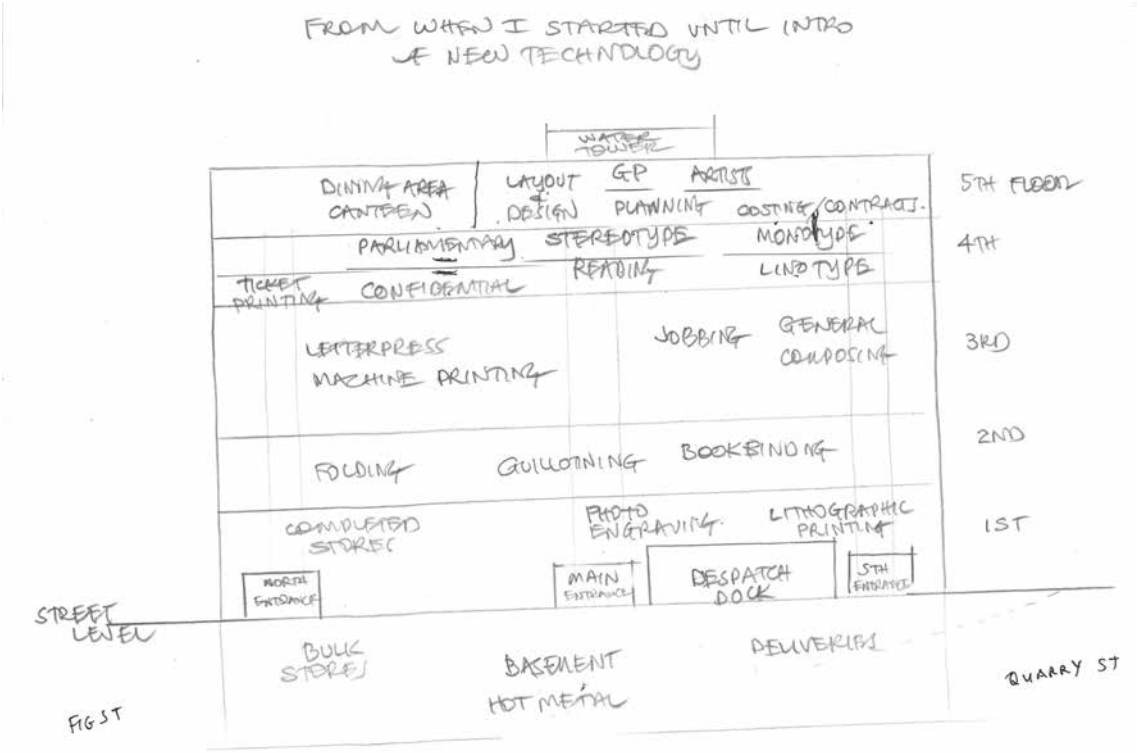

Fig. 44 **George Woods, 'From when I started until intro of new technology', 2012**, section sketch of the Gov drawn during an oral history interview, reproduced with permission.

Similarly, compositor George Woods picked up a pencil during our oral history interview. In describing the Gov to me, he found it useful to sketch certain aspects of the building – a picture of a composing rack and a section drawing of the Gov. Fig. 44 is one of his drawings from our interview in February 2012. It shows a rough section drawing of the Gov in which the trade sections are specifically delineated in the building. Notably, George titled his drawing with 'From when I started until intro of new technology'. This shows a specific binary delineation that George has made between 'old' and 'new' technologies (essentially, hot metal typesetting to computerisation), rather than a gradual transition.

Taking inspiration from George's drawing, I produced my own sectional drawing of the Gov. Fig. 45 is a synthesis of oral histories and archival photographs. It is a way of pulling together stories into a spatial system, into an illustrative rendering of oral histories. The illustration tells a variety of anecdotal and historical details that emerged from interviews.

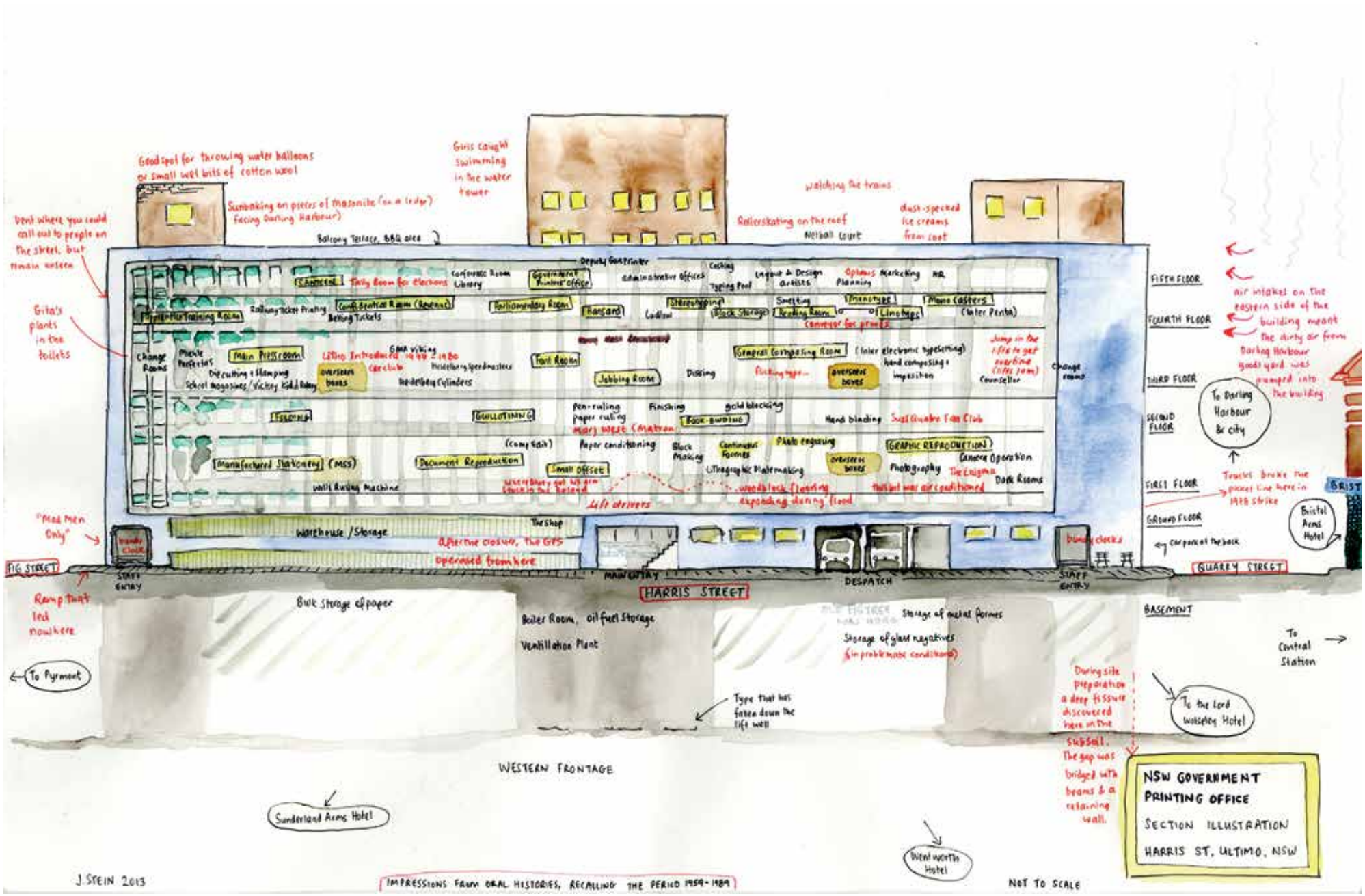

Fig. 45 Section illustration of the Government Printing Office, 2013, by the author, impressions from oral histories, watercolour on paper.

For example, I have marked out where you could get onto the roof and sun-bake on slabs of Masonite, or crouch above the BBQ deck area and throw little wet pieces of cotton wool onto the administrative staff while they gathered at a function. I have indicated the water-tanks on the roof, the scandalous location where in the 1960s some young women went swimming. I have drawn where on one the side of the building there was a vent and you could shout at people down on the street without being seen. I have marked out how Level Two was home to the Suzi Quatro fan club and roughly indicated where the original lithographic area was, where 'Bluey' (Graham Smith) got his arm stuck in the Roland press. When the Goods Yard was still operating, if you stood out on the roof with an ice-cream, it would be speckled with black in no-time at all. While Fig. 45 is of course a subjective rendering of oral history stories, it gives some indication of the spatial situatedness of many of the narratives that emerged through the interviewing process, which in turn lends a more nuanced understanding of an industrial building to our historical knowledge.

The slip and grip of embodied memory: tales of woodblock floors

Pallasmaa has noted the significance of the horizontal plane on architectural memory:

> There is yet another dimension of architectural memory. Architectural experiences have historicity and ontology of their own. Architecture begins with the establishment of a horizontal plane; consequently the floor is the 'oldest' and most potent element of architecture.[96]

Pallasmaa follows by calling for attention to the lived experience of architecture and architectural memory. He suggests we attend to 'primary architectural experiences', such as the 'floorness' of the floor, the 'roofness' of the roof.[97] Certain themes and topics regularly emerged in this oral history project. The 'floorness' of the floor was something that drew the attention of the Gov's employees. The Gov's floors were endgrain woodblock, covering more than

[96] J. Pallasmaa, op. cit., p. 28.

[97] ibid.

18,581 square metres (200,000 square feet), which at the time was reported as 'probably largest area of endgrain wood block flooring of any building in Australia'.[98]

Fig. 46 **John Lumley (right) and another worker lay the woodblock floors at the Government Printing Office, c. 1958.** Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 16673.

The flooring was laid in 1958 by the contractor George Hudson, who employed young men and boys (including locals from Ultimo), to lay the floors with tar, and sand and varnish them. In the course of my research I came across a photograph of two young men laying the woodblocks in the new Government Printing Office building in 1958. [Fig. 46]

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[98] 'Printers' office paved in blocks' (1958), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September, p. 39.

George Bryant confirmed that the man on the right was the late John Lumley, his brother-in-law. In aesthetic terms, Fig. 46 is an arresting image. Due to the proximity of the two workers' bodies, the photograph is most likely posed. The material culture details of this crisp photograph are remarkable. The men are shirtless, in shorts, with glossy hair, rough tar-covered shoes and bare hands. They are laying the woodblocks onto the floor by hand, one after the other. Their tattoos are visible and the tar in the foreground appears slick and sticky, a stark contrast to the soft matte surface of the woodblocks. In the background you can see unvarnished and newly laid flooring. Also discernible is an empty milk bottle and the medium-height skyline of Sydney's CBD out the windows.

The sheer quantity of endgrain woodblocks must have been remarkable to observe, particularly in the early years when the blocks were polished and new. Later on, the woodblocks became discoloured, dented from dropped chases, stained with ink, swelled and buckled from water spills and featuring the trace of lines painted to indicate safe paths around the machinery. Some former employees framed their statements about the flooring as either 'good' or 'bad' design, or in terms of the physical comfort for the standing worker. The problem-prone nature of expanding woodblock flooring was regularly described. Graeme Murray took this approach:

> One point in the building design, which wasn't good: all the floors were done in wooden blocks, like bricks. It was beautifully laid out. Whoever the architect was – who I mostly thought was fantastic <pause> but the problem was that the water and bricks don't mix. And if we had sinks overflow all the bricks would swell up, so you'd have a sort of mound, the floor would go up. And they'd have to take all the bricks up and relay them.[99]

Alan Leishman spoke with more enthusiasm about the floors, without prompting:

> The floors were the amazing things. Those wooden block floors. They were made out of <pause> what's the timber? Very soft timber. Yellowy soft timber. They'd be stuck down with things and there'd be a bloke working around the room all day with a tarpot, a boiling tarpot, dipping these in

[99] Graeme Murray, interview with author, 9 September 2011.

and putting 'em down. Then they'd sand it, then they'd varnish it.

The floors were the thing that really caught my attention.[100]

Terry Hagenhofer described the problems that could occur when the woodblock floors expanded from moisture, causing the floors to swell and warm. Notably, Terry shifted straight to discussing the floors when I asked about the building itself:

Jesse: What are your memories of being in the building and what the building was like to work in?

Terry: Terrific. Parquetry floors, you know? We, yeah, it was just amazing, first walking in and seeing these parquetry floors, the timber blocks. They went through a period when they re-did the whole place, the blokes came in and re-laid these parquetry blocks, that was probably <pause> in the mid-80s.[101]

Former letterpress printer Norm Rigney launched into a lengthy story about problems with the woodblock floors. The narrative is quoted at length because of the way in which it interweaves aspects of working life, apprentice experience, distain for management, material culture and the experience of *play* at work.

One night, now it must have been about 1968, I think. Friday night … He [Government Printer VCN Blight] come in showing some of his Mason cronies around the place, and they got to the first floor, and they're wandering around having a look at everything, and one of the guys apparently was sick. He went over and he hurked[102] in a basin. This was one of the guys with him, one of his entourage that he was showin' around, in the night-time. … Anyway, this guy was sick in a basin, and he turned a tap on to allow everything to go down the drain, but what happened was – we used to have a flat bit of rubber, you know a rubber

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[100] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[101] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011.

[102] Hurked: slang for vomited.

stereo, that we used to cut to make a plug, because the plugs'd go missing everywhere. Anyway, this plug, floated over and blocked the drain. This guy was so drunk, he left the tap running. So – over the course of the weekend, this tap kept running, it overflowed the basin, and it flooded the first floor. … The floor was made up of wooden blocks, Oregon wooden blocks, which would take the weight and the movement and everything, and it would stop the reverberation and everything that would go on in the place. But water – they were set in tar – so this water flooded the MSS section (which was Manufactured Stationery). It flooded that. The photo section was next door. It flooded the photo section. These blocks swelled in the flood. I went in – I was very privileged you know – I went in. The floor was floatin' and you could jump around on the floor like a trampoline, it was waves of wooden blocks, and where the wooden blocks had come to a stop, they pyramided. They were pyramided six foot high! There were machines tipped, there were rolls of paper that had soaked up the water. They were ruined! Not only had that happened – the water flooded through the warehouse underneath, and destroyed so much of the stock … It got to the basement. It ruined paper rolls – big reels of paper! … It went through the warehouse where there was all this steel shelving … you can see where the water-mark <pause> where the water has run through these books during the flood. Now I think that would have been about 1968. Because it was before the Government Printer retired … So Mr Blight, <pause> I don't know. There was never any reports about it, no nothing. I don't know how it was ever covered up,[103] but that flooded, and at the time it was worth tens of thousands of dollars, and I don't know how much the bill was or anything like that. I mean, I was only in the final year of my apprenticeship … It was a dreadful mess. Now, I came

[103] In my research I have not come across any official records of this flood (so it is possible that it was covered up to avoid adverse reports in the press). A number of oral history participants described a similar event to the one Norm Rigney recounts here, but not in such extreme terms.

> to work on the Monday morning, and I'm walking along Harris Street – because we used to enter in the end door – and there was water drippin' out of the building. And I thought, 'Oh, what's happened?' Anyway, we got up into the ground floor, and there, you know, everything is <gestures with arms to show hills of wooden blocks> so we got off at the first floor, and this is how – we were bouncing through! Oh, it was terrific. Billy Bright was there, he was the superintendent. And he was runnin' around saying, 'Get outta here you kids! Get outta here! I don't want anyone in here!'[104]

Norm is a natural storyteller and his interview was filled with anecdotes similar to this one. The story may well have been embellished over the years, but it is Norm's sense of pride and the acknowledgement of his 'privilege' that is particularly meaningful. For Norm, access to the Gov was something rare and to be cherished. In addition, we can see how the recounting of this tale traces a path spatially through the Gov, through the ground floor, down into the basement, out onto the footpath. The smooth, assuring solidity of the modern building had been disrupted overnight, transformed into an undulating, bouncing, pyramiding landscape of technical dysfunction – a space where the apprentices (who were, after all, teenage boys) could temporarily transform their workplace into a site for diversion and exploration.

Other interview participants recalled a flood, but none of them described it in terms as dramatic as Norm. Ray Utick and George Larden talked about the floors and an unexpected connection with composition and metal type emerged:

> George: They bubbled up quite a bit! <chuckles>
>
> *Ray: They used to have to bitumen them back all the time, didn't they?*
>
> *The blocks.*
>
> **Jesse: They bubbled up, you say?**
>
> George: Bubbled up.
>
> *Ray: We went to work one morning, there was a mound about so high!*
>
> <gestures about 1 metre high>

[104] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012.

Jesse: And did that come from moisture?

Ray: It happened overnight, I don't know.

George: It all depended on pressure, where they got a bit of pressure in a certain spot.

Jesse: It's a bit like type. It's similar to type.

Ray: With the spaces coming out? Yeah! Well, with the type, sometimes if the furniture on the edge of the type was done up too tight, the type could spring up too. That happened many a time.[105]

From modern ruin to twenty-first century data centre

After the closure of the Gov in 1989, the building temporarily became a phantom space, a modern ruin; during the 1990s it was a hollowed-out office, empty and disused. At times it was used for sports training, at times it housed temporary art galleries, but some sections remained empty, apart from a few remnant pieces of paper that were never cleaned after the closure of the Gov. Finally, the building's use continues to this day as a repository of information; it is now a cloud computing centre run by the multinational data-management company Global Switch. [Fig. 47] On 30 January 2012 I was taken on a tour through the building and I found very little inside that recognisably connected to the Printing Office. The building now houses computer servers and associated technology. Workers are scarce and whole rooms are filled with wires and cabinetry, whirring with digital storage activity. Nevertheless there is some continuity in the building's use as a repository for *information*, except information is no longer held in 'standing formes' of composed metal type, no longer stored in legible, tangible stacks of paper and rows of bound volumes. Rather, it exists as ephemeral, ungraspable digital data, stored in Global Switch's computer servers.

This means that the built heritage of the Gov is concealed and mute. Oral histories and photographic archives are the chief sources through which a rich understanding of the spatial

[105] George Larden and Ray Utick, interview with author, 14 March 2013.

parameters of working life at the Gov can emerge. The recollections and stories provided in this chapter indicate that the Gov employees' experience and identity at work was not merely a technological or social matter; it was also experienced in place and space and they mapped their experiences as they spoke. This demonstrates that there is more to be said about ordinary buildings, and this one in particular, when we shift away from purely aesthetic or technical interpretations, toward a position that takes into account social, labour and embodied experiences, and the ways in which these experiences persist in memory.

Fig. 47 The former Government Printing Office building in Ultimo, Sydney, 2013. Now extensively refurbished and occupied by the data-storage company Global Switch. Photograph by the author.

PART II

TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

4. Press-machinists & their presses: the continuity of craft masculinity during the shift from letterpress to offset-lithography 1960s – 1980s

Fig. 48 **Shong Babbog operates a Heidelberg Cylinder letterpress machine in the Main Pressroom, c. 1960s**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

Introduction

> I could still get on there and operate that, you know.[1]

This chapter considers the effect that an autonomous technical artefact – the printing press – had on the workers in charge of them, the press-machinists. It understands the printing press to possess material and social agency in the continuity and transformation of craft masculinity.[2] This issue is examined in the context of the technological shift from letterpress printing to high-speed offset-lithography, which took place in the printing industry in advanced capitalist economies between the 1960s and the 1980s.[3]

Charting the printing industry's transition from letterpress to offset-lithography opens a window of understanding into the relevance and influence of large-scale technical machinery on the shop floor. This is related back to the reinforcement of craft masculinities in declining industrial contexts. As noted in the Preface and Introduction, in the second half of the twentieth century the printing industry – which had long been seen as a bastion of craft control – was confronted by the need to engage with high-speed, automated (and later computerised) printing technologies. Long after many other manufacturing industries had undergone almost complete automation, printing industry employers gradually began to introduce offset-lithography and computerised typesetting, as it sped up the production process and theoretically required fewer

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[1] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012.

[2] My use of the term 'material agency' has echoes in Jane Bennett's understanding of the 'recalcitrance or vitality in things', a position that argues for the 'possibility that attentiveness to (non-human) things and their powers can have a laudable effect on humans'. See: J. Bennett (2004), 'The force of things: Steps toward an ecology of matter', *Political Theory*, vol. 32, June, p. 348. Similarly, Andrew Pickering describes how material agency emerges not via material things having some magical capacity of their own, but through the combination of entangled material and human realms together producing particular outcomes. See also A. Pickering (1995), *The mangle of practice: Time, agency and science*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, pp. 50–54.

[3] F. Robertson (2013), *Print culture: From steam press to ebook*, Routledge, London & New York, p. 98; M. Twyman, (2001), *Breaking the mould: The first hundred years of lithography*, The British Library, London, p. 173; A. Marshall (1983), *Changing the word: The printing industry in transition*, Comedia Publishing Group, London, pp. 34–42; G.A. Brandjes (1974), 'Latest developments in sheet-fed offset printing', *Ninth Australasian Government Printers' Conference*, South Australian Government Printing Office, Adelaide, pp. 61–69; Macrae, Patterson & Tobin (1971), 'Offset printing and its various aspects', *Seventh Australasian Government Printers' Conference*, New Zealand Government Printing Office, Wellington, pp. 74–83; A. Ewald, (1973), 'The philosophy of modern offset press design', *Eighth Australasian Government Printers' Conference*, Victorian Government Printing Office, Melbourne, pp. 57–66; J. Moran, (1969), 'Printing in the seventies', *The Penrose Annual*, vol. 62, pp. 126–27, 139–40. This transition took place somewhat earlier in the United States and parts of Europe, and a little later in the United Kingdom and Australia.

skilled workers. This introduction of new technologies in typesetting, bookbinding and press-machining resulted in the swift disappearance of specific printing trades and associated job losses, particularly between the 1960s and the 1980s.[4]

This chapter focuses on the Gov's letterpress section in the process of technological transition, allowing us to see how particular practices and identities are sometimes maintained and reinvigorated when a conservative institution is threatened with change. From 1977, as lithographic presses were introduced, letterpress-machinists at the Gov gradually relinquished their last remaining hand-skills in letterpress.

When I began this research in 2011, one of the first matters that piqued my interest was that some of the press-machinists I spoke with did not express much concern or regret about the transition from letterpress to lithography; the change was not always described in negative terms and there was little suggestion that it emasculated or degraded these workers. Why, I wondered, would these printers – who often expressed great pride in having been apprenticed in letterpress – let go so easily of their hard-won craft skills and take up work on machinery that was more automated and could result in major job losses in their own specialised field of work? The answer is complex and layered and press-machinists experienced this technological transition in a variety of ways; they did not all have the same reaction to the change. The strength of the combined unions and the provision of retraining programs at the Gov would have provided a relatively secure environment for change, but this does not give us the full picture. Importantly, the acceptance of lithography by some letterpress-machinists must be understood in relation to existing gender and craft identities and in reference to the specific presence of machinery on the shop floor.

At the same time as lithography was replacing letterpress, the rise of second-wave feminism and associated social changes were altering the long-standing traditional ways of hiring and working

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[4] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, pp. 14–22; C. Cockburn (1999 [1981]), 'The material of male power', in D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman (eds), *The social shaping of technology*, 2nd edn, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, p. 177, first published in (1981), 'The material of male power', *Feminist Review* 9, pp. 41–58; A. Marshall, op. cit., pp. 10–12.

at the Gov.[5] Accordingly, we need not assume that all press-machinist were men (although the vast majority were), although it is true that press-machining remained male-dominated until the closure of the factory in 1989. While this chapter does not focus on the experience of female-press machinists, it must be acknowledged that the performance of a masculine culture of craft operated to exclude and discriminate against the few women who entered the press-machining trade in the late 1970s and 1980s, as will be discussed in chapters Seven and Eight. Although the increasing use of offset-lithography meant that press-machining work was lighter and theoretically more available to women (and to people with smaller, weaker bodies in general), this did not immediately open the press-machining trade to women. The fact that women in non-traditional trades experienced harassment and institutional discrimination is already established; this chapter lends background to this issue by exploring the reinvigoration of masculinist craft culture in the second half of the twentieth century. This, in turn, is linked to the identity-generating relationship that developed particularly between male press-machinists and their presses.

At the Gov the technical conversion from letterpress to offset-lithography was met with some union resistance and controversy on the shop floor, as well as with adaptive measures to accord with trade demarcation restrictions.[6] This will be explained in more detail in the section concerning the introduction of the Heidelberg Speedmasters, the first lithographic presses to be introduced into the Main Pressroom at the Gov. The important point here is that this technological transition did not dramatically destabilise or erode the well-established and socially-constructed labour identity of the skilled craftsman printer. Rather, the shift from letterpress to lithography was accompanied by a re-emphasis on craft masculinity, despite the fact that the labour of lithography became increasingly automated and less 'hands-on' and the work much lighter.

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[5] The Gov began to indenture female apprentices from as early as 1974 (in typesetting and bookbinding), and 1978 (in press-machining). See Chapter Eight for detail on women's experience working in non-traditional printing trades.

[6] E.C. Bennett (1979), *New technology and the Australian printing industry*, Printing and Kindred Industries Union, Sydney; G.F. Smith (1979), 'Attitudes towards technological change at the NSW Government Printing Office', Masters thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney, p. 2.

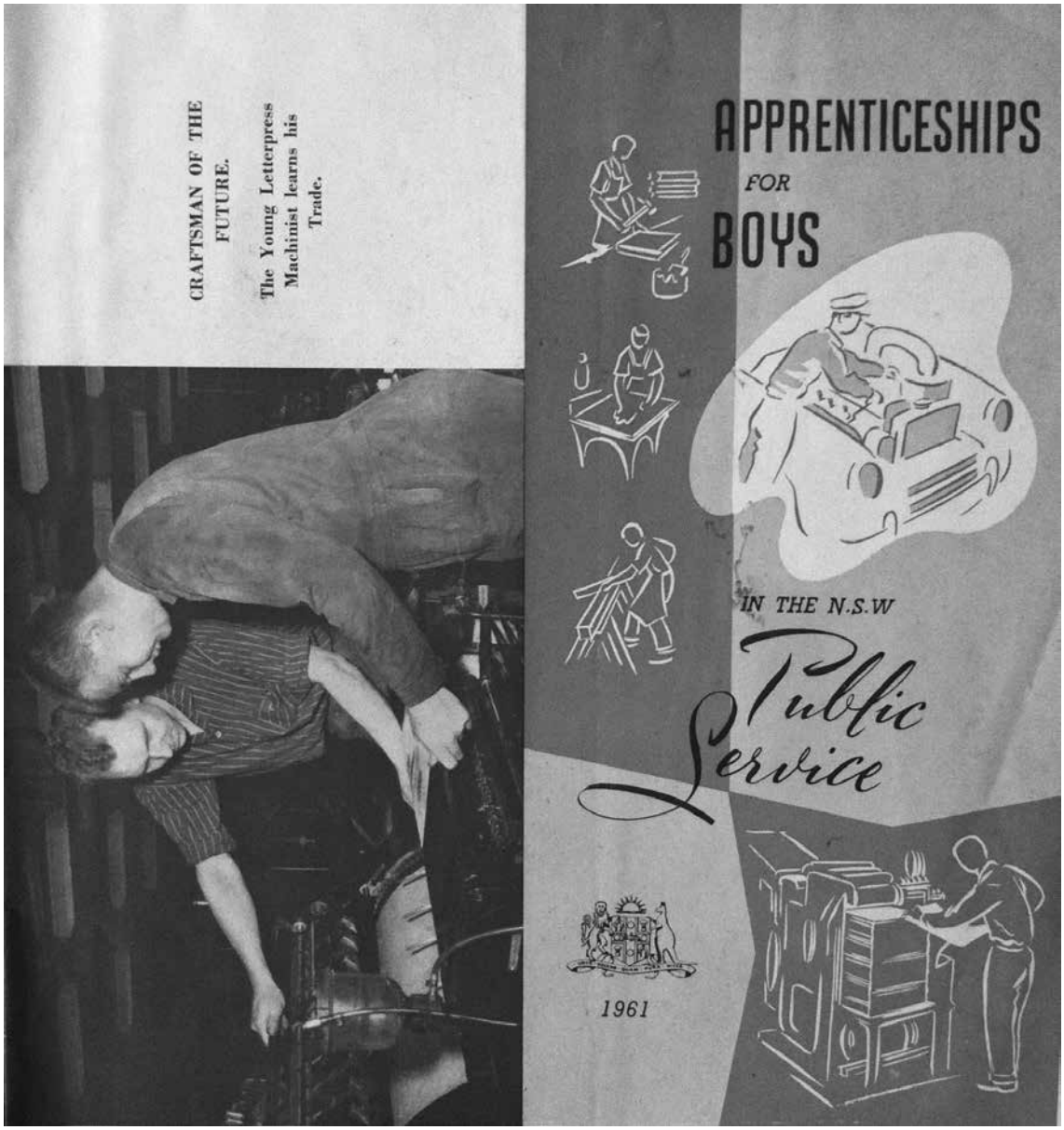

Fig. 49 **Cover of *Apprenticeships for Boys in the NSW Public Service*, 1961**, NSW government leaflet, courtesy of Ray Utick.

The oral history interviews used in this project – in addition to photographs and amateur film made by press-machinists themselves – provide evidence that male press-machinists continue to interpret their working lives and identities in almost constant relation to the presses they used.[7] Press-machinists' attachment to machinery took the form of embodied knowledge (an understanding of technology experienced through practice), as well as an aesthetic and

[7] Female press-machinists, on the other hand, tell stories about coping, managing and working things out, and they speak of an experience that was frequently defined in terms of their otherness; see Chapter Eight.

pleasurable appreciation of presses as smooth-running autonomous objects. *What* was printed was rarely of interest; it is the machines themselves that emerge regularly in press-machinists' stories. Through their chosen stories and language it is possible to see how their focus is much more on *process* and far less on the product they were involved in creating. This observation allows us to observe the active and sometimes contentious role that printing presses played in the politics of the shop floor and the significance of the machinery itself to the way in which productive relations of work were settled and reconfigured with technological change.

In oral history interviews, printing machinery was often mentioned very early in the interview, without prompting. Lithographer Ken Duffey, who was apprenticed at the Gov in 1958, began by explaining:

> I was the first apprentice into the new Government Printing Office in Harris Street and the old lithography section was in a building in the bottom of Liverpool Street. When the machinery came over, it was all English machinery, basically machines called Crabtrees. They were a quad-crown machine, which is a 30" by 40" sheet. And they had a small machine called a Solar, which was a Swedish machine <pause> and I think that printed <pause> I think it was about 24" by about <pause> I can't remember the size. Yeah so that was basically <pause> and they had a lot of small offset machines, like Multiliths.[8]

Similarly, letterpress printer Ray Utick – apprenticed at the Gov in 1955 – explained his apprenticeship experience specifically in terms of the different machinery to which he was assigned:

> They put me with an English chap on a Victoria Platen. That was a pretty solid one. Dangerous things, too. Especially when the safety guards don't work properly … And I was on that for ages, because the boss didn't like me much … Then I went onto another, on my own – an Albert Automat

[8] Ken Duffey, interview with author, 11 February 2012.

> [Fig. 63] – which very few people worked … I just graduated up to different machinery.[9]

At first, it might seem banal that these printers recount details of specific machines. But to dismiss this focus on machinery as 'natural' or 'boring' would be to miss the point that these printers' sense of craft masculinity is expressed through their knowledge of printing machinery. There is nothing natural about the way in which these men's identities are simultaneously constructed around notions of craft skill *and* technological mastery. A masculine identity is one that permits individual men or groups of them to pursue particular paths of action, at the same time as excluding others. Masculine craft identities are also inextricably embodied through their embeddedness in practice, and they are inextricably connected to the technology that 'craftsmen' have authority over. An awareness of this dynamic allows us to see how printing presses are historically active agents and how their presence and use was (and still is) intimately tied to press-machinists' sense of professional identity and masculinity.

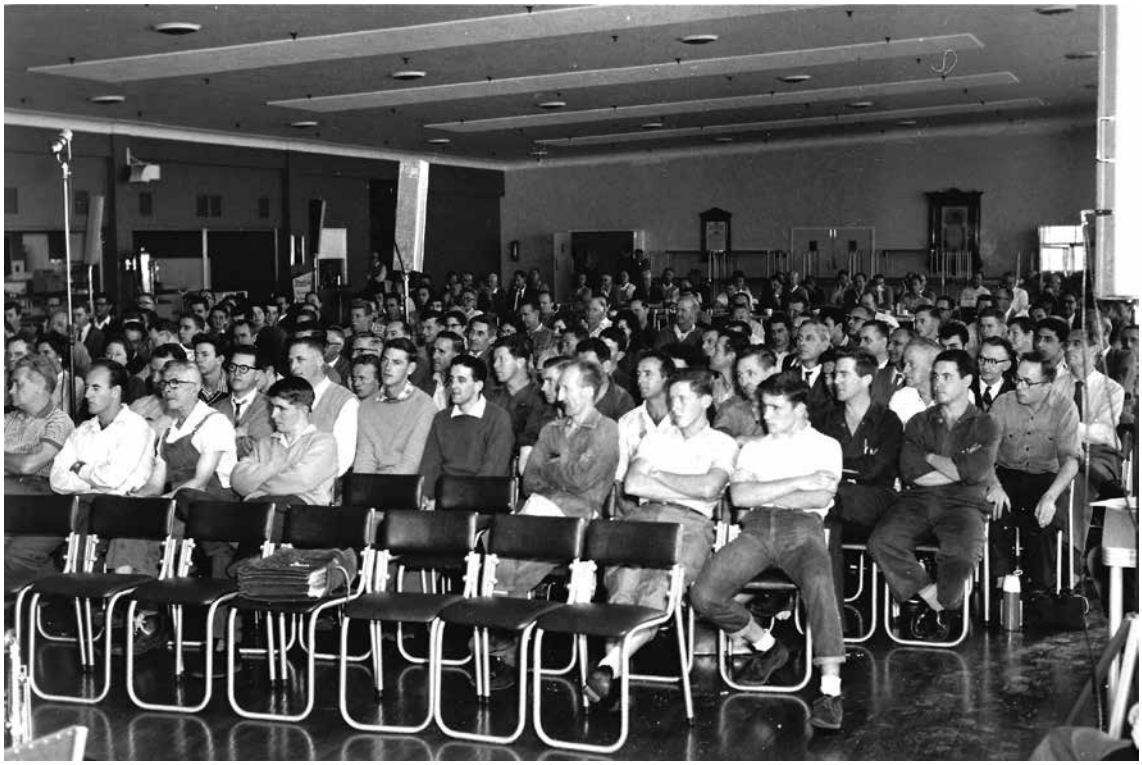

Fig. 50 **Staff gather for a meeting in the Canteen on the fifth floor, c. 1960s**. Photograph by John Cusack, reproduced with permission.

[9] Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

Craft masculinities

Labour and gender theorist Ava Baron argues that while historians have investigated women's labour culture in relation to sex, sexuality and appearance, the embodied or bodily aspects of men's working culture has been treated as self-evident and not examined closely in labour history (although it has been the subject of inquiry in other disciplines, such as sociology).[10] With that in mind, it is worth remembering that male press-machinists' roles and embodied practices are not 'natural' but are socially and culturally inscribed and reinscribed at different points of time. That being said, historians such as Steven Maynard and Stephen Meyer have engaged with certain forms of working-class masculinity and attempted to link these dynamics to changes in the labour process. Their analyses are useful in unpacking why some press-machinists maintained the ethos of craft masculinity, notwithstanding technological change.

The idea of the continuity and remaking of craft masculinity on the shop floor recalls Maynard's and Meyer's respective analyses of changes to working-class masculinity in the face of automation and deskilling in the automotive industry.[11] In 1989 Maynard attempted to place discussions of working-class masculinity more firmly within labour history, asking 'by what process capitalism co-opts not only workers' labour power but also their sense of pride and masculinity?'[12] Maynard understood working-class masculinity as a 'contradictory and changing' cultural identity, not as a singular 'norm'. He emphasised how a worker – whose experience of the labour process is potentially degraded by technological change – may still preserve the ideological pretence that his work constituted skilled 'craftsmanship'. Essentially Maynard saw that this process of reassurance and reemphasis on craft skill was a fundamentally gendered activity.[13]

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[10] Ava Baron's work explores 'how to incorporate the "bodily turn" in history by examining three conceptual themes in research on working-class masculinity: masculinity crises, muscular masculinity, and homosociality'. See for example A. Baron (2006), 'Masculinity, the embodied male worker, and the historian's gaze', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 69, Spring, pp. 143–60.

[11] S. Maynard (1989), 'Rough work and rugged men: The social construction of masculinity in working class history', *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 23, Spring, pp. 159–69; S. Meyer (2001), 'Work, play, and power: Masculine culture on the automotive shop floor, 1930–1960', in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys? Masculinity, technology and class in America*, Routledge, New York and London, pp. 13–32.

[12] S. Maynard, op. cit., p. 161.

[13] ibid., p. 164.

In 2001 Meyer built upon Maynard's discussion of changing forms of working class masculinity, making connections between shop floor labour, the practices of workplace resistance and play, and a multiplicity of masculinities. Specifically, Meyer described a balance of 'rough' and 'respectable' masculinities that existed in the twentieth century automotive industry. 'Rough' masculinity emerged, says Meyer, from a brutal world of the unskilled labourer, while 'respectable' manhood emerged from the social pride, skill and security of the craft tradition.[14] Both Meyer and Maynard speak of how the industrial revolution produced two crises: that of industrialism and that of masculinity.[15] The increasing mechanisation of industrial labour not only left workers exploited by capital, it also emasculated them and stripped them of their various working class male identities. Meyer states:

> These forces undermined the rough masculine identity through the elimination of brawn and strength from unskilled work, and subverted the respectable identity through the removal of independence and control from skilled work.[16]

One response to this 'crisis of masculinity' was to rebuild modified forms of masculinity in the new, mechanised shop floors. Meyer explains how:

> The dual crises of industrialism and masculinity prompted working class (and other) men to re-masculinise their work and identities'.[17]

Strategies for doing this included enacting 'boyish' forms of play and through controlling output pace (slow-downs), but also included an increasing social display of sexualised masculine bravado.

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[14] S. Meyer, op. cit., pp. 13–16.

[15] S. Meyer, op. cit., p. 17; S. Maynard, 'Rough work and rugged men', pp. 183–97. Maynard later critiqued his own use of the term 'crisis of masculinity', noting that the term 'crisis' could be seen to refer to a coherent, unified system, which masculinity arguably never was. See S. Maynard (1998), 'Queer musings on masculinity and history', *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 42, Fall, pp. 183–97.

[16] S. Meyer, op. cit., p. 16.

[17] ibid., p. 17.

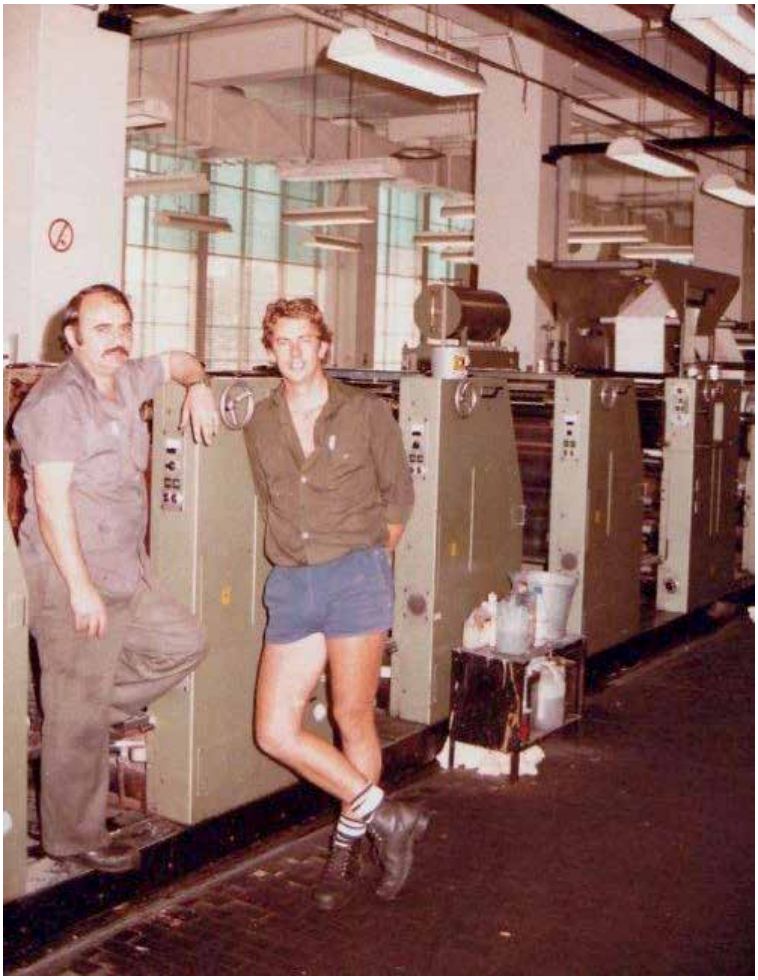

Fig. 51 **Press-machinist Glenn MacKellar (right) and his offsider, George, 1981**, with the lithographic Lotto machines. Courtesy of Glenn MacKellar, reproduced with permission. 'Many printers had their own offsider and a good one was worth having. George and I worked together on many machines for five years or so.' – Glenn MacKellar.

This notion of a performed, re-emphasised masculinity is also a feature of British sociologist and oral historian Paul Thompson's analysis of how deskilled autoworkers from Coventry were merely 'playing at being skilled men'.[18] In a defensive response to the decline in need for their skilled labour, Coventry autoworkers enacted their gender identity through increased masculine rituals and rites of passage, through larking off, fights and sexual boasting, which took the place of actual skilled labour. Here, Thompson's interpretation of 'skill' is construed in fairly traditional terms. Given that it is now broadly established that 'the concept of skill itself is gender bound',[19]

[18] P. Thompson (1988), 'Playing at being skilled men: Factory culture and pride in work skills among Coventry car workers', *Social History*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 45–69.

[19] A. Baron (1991), 'Gender and labor history: Learning from the past, looking to the future', in A. Baron (ed.), *Work engendered*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, p. 14.

and its value is more or less socially constituted,[20] it is possible to see how Thompson's notion of 'skill' remained rather limited and masculinist when he wrote 'Playing at being skilled men' in 1988. But Thompson's point about a re-emphasis on craft masculinity can still be of use. In Thompson's view, as workers found themselves deskilled and threatened with redundancy, their only recourse to power was through a performance of masculinity; through playing up and through reinvigorating mythical notions of craft prowess in an assembly-line era, or what Thompson calls 'their defiantly resilient factory floor culture'.[21]

When examining apprenticeship in the Sydney metal trades between 1914 and 1931, labour historian John Shields came to the conclusion that the 'masculine culture of craft' has not disappeared during this period, despite major transformations in technology. In reference to the degradation of the labour process and the decline of skill thesis put forward first by Harry Braverman in 1974,[22] Shields argues:

> This scenario of decline has seriously underestimated the historical resilience of the craftsman, his institutions, and his culture.[23]

While Shields is keen to argue for the authenticity and continuity of the craftsman's culture, Thompson suggests that craft masculinity came to be *performed* rather than actual. While Shields does not offer many reasons why the culture of craft masculinity continued well into the industrialised era, he explains that the apprenticeship system was the tool through which this 'fraternal and sectional, labourist and masculinist' culture of craft was maintained.[24]

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[20] A. Game & R. Pringle (1983), *Gender at work*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, pp. 7–8; R. Reed (1987), 'Making newspapers pay: Employment of women's skills in newspaper production', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 27–28; J. Shields (1995), 'Deskilling revisited: Continuity and change in craft work and apprenticeship in late nineteenth century New South Wales', *Labour History*, vol. 68, May, pp. 1–29.

[21] P. Thompson, 'Playing at being skilled men', p. 50.

[22] H. Braverman (1998 [1974]), *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 146–57.

[23] J. Shields (1992), 'Craftsmen in the making: The memory and meaning of apprenticeship in Sydney between the Great War and the Great Depression', in Shields (ed.), *All our labours: Oral histories of working life in twentieth century Sydney*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p. 90. Shields notes that in Australian industrial contexts, it depends on the industry as to whether 'craft strongholds' have been retained. He notes that the carpentry, joinery, masonry, metal, bricklaying, painting and printing industries were trades that retained artisanal culture and craft-worker agency. See J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', pp. 4, 6.

[24] J. Shields, 'Craftsmen in the making', p. 88. See Ruth Oldenziel for a discussion of how practical, on-the-job training served not only to formulate men's class identities, but also 'represented a formalised ritual of male socialisation'. R. Oldenziel (1999), *Making technology masculine: Men, women and modern machines in America, 1870–1945*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, pp. 56–57.

Through apprenticeships, the 'customary rites and rituals' of nineteenth century craft labour were replicated and reinforced, initiating boys into a constructed ideal of 'skilled manhood'.[25] In examining the apprenticeship system in the United States, Ava Baron states:

> To printers, apprenticeship was more than a system of acquiring technical skills; it was a boon to their craft respectability as well … an essential ingredient in acquiring manhood … The boy learned to be a man in class terms, and to be a worker in gender terms.[26]

This affirms the influence of the apprenticeship system in the making and remaking of craft masculinities.

Learning one's way into technical manhood and craft masculinity could be a life-long process. This learned form of craft masculinity, argues Shields, was characterised by a sense of artisan dignity and a perception of one's moral worth. Since apprenticed trades continued to be explicitly related to concepts of medieval tradition, the mystique of craft culture was emphasised, imbuing the mechanised factory domain with the notion that a certain class of men were innately meant to be associated with technological and craft skill.[27] Shields notes:

> Craft work was man's work, but not every man measured up to the standards of craft. In particular, craft masculinism was quite distinct from the gender self-image embraced by those other men of metal, the trade assistants and the labourers – the 'ironworkers'. Whereas the tradesmen derived collective self-esteem from practical learning, accumulated experience, precision hand-work, premeditation and craft conformity, the ironworkers valorised youth, physical prowess, individualism, innate ability, risk-taking, spontaneity, and proletarian non-conformity, or what

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[25] J. Shields, 'Craftsmen in the making', p. 89.

[26] A. Baron (1991), 'An "other" side of gender antagonism at work: Men, boys, and the remasculinization of printers' work, 1830–1920', in A. Baron (ed.), *Work engendered*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, p. 50.

[27] See Oldenziel for another example of the way in which medieval 'craft' symbols and mystique were mobilised in a way that socialised boys into a particular understanding of their technical abilities and skills. R. Oldenziel (2001), 'Boys and their toys: The Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild, 1930–1968, and the making of a male technical domain', in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys?,* pp. 139–68.

might be termed a 'larrikin' version of collective male worker identity.[28]

This makes a distinction between a masculine craft ethos and the masculinity associated with (non-trade) labourers in the same industrial context – a distinction that became blurred with time, according to Meyer's reading of masculinity in the automotive industry.

Although Shields is writing about Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, his point can extend to the second half. Unlike the United States, the apprenticeship system remained the prevailing labour-training system in the Australian printing industry (among other manufacturing industries).[29] Up to the 1980s in union strongholds such as the Gov, a press-machinist's labour process was structured by a union branch known as a chapel and the union-elected liaison between the workers and management was still known as the Father of the Chapel (FoC). Apprenticeships and access to employment was managed and tightly controlled through the union, in this case the PKIU, which restricted apprentice numbers. Like other printing trades, press-machining apprenticeships generally took between five and seven years. Once boys were indentured, apprentice press-machinists were generally paired with a tradesman (journeyman or master) for their first years, before being allowed to use presses independently. In this way, press-machinists linked their belief in their craft skills to a particular understanding of growing into manhood and this form of masculinity was something that was learned, emulated and passed on from tradesman to apprentice.[30] The reward for growing up was being independently assigned to a press, thus deeply linking concepts of skill, manhood and machinery.

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[28] J. Shields, 'Craftsmen in the making', p. 109.

[29] J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited'; J. Shields (1995), 'A matter of skill: the rise of compulsory apprenticeship in early twentieth century New South Wales', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 236–62; A. Baron, 'An "other" side of gender antagonism at work'.

[30] J. Shields, 'Craftsmen in the making'; A. Baron, 'The "other" side of gender antagonism at work'; R. Oldenziel, 'Boys and their toys'; B. Oliver, B. 2007, ' "They can't take a trade off you" – Varying perceptions of job security over 50 years at the Midland Government Railway Workshops', in J. Kimber & P. Love (eds), *The time of their lives: The eight hour day and working life*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Melbourne, pp. 156–57.

Fig. 52 **Lunchtime or morning tea, early 1960s**, apprentices in the letterpress area. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

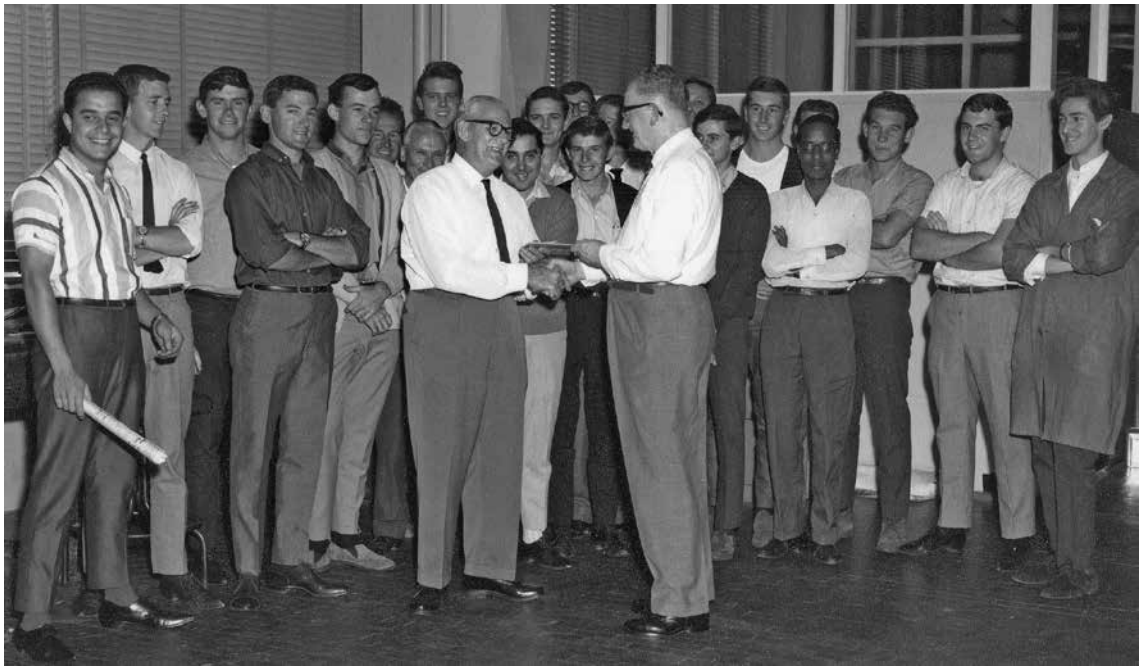

Fig. 53. **The Photographic Section farewells photoengraver Bill O'Sullivan, c. 1965**. Courtesy of Graeme Murray, pictured fifth from left. Berdj Momdjian pictured on far left.

In the case of the press-machinists at the Gov, these workers combined elements of what Meyer terms 'rough' and 'respectable' masculinity, or what Shields calls a 'craft ethos' with a rougher, 'larrikin' identity, in varying forms. Pranks, practical jokes and apprentice initiations were commonplace.[31] Weaker or older workers were the subject of derision and drinking was a major part of press-machinists' social culture at the Gov. Practical experience and concrete evidence of technological knowledge was valued over formal qualifications. Printers' slang bonded the press-machinists with a shared language, and the physical strength required to lift a hefty letterpress forme made the press-machining trade exclusive, off limits to women and weaker men.[32]

Evidently there isn't a singular kind of craft masculinity; there are valences and varieties of experience and identification.[33] Press-machinists, of course, brought to work other experiences and values from their own cultural and domestic backgrounds. There are commonalities,

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[31] See Chapter Nine for further discussion of workplace pranks, rituals, initiations and games.

[32] See Chapter Eight for a discussion of press-machining and heavy lifting in relation to women in trades.

[33] While R.W. Connell explains that 'hegemonic masculinity' is associated with the technological realm and with concepts of technical skill, both Connell and Judy Wajcman acknowledge that there is no singular 'hegemonic masculinity', and the concept is not immutable; it is subject to transformation over time. See R.W. Connell (1987), *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*, Allen & Unwin, Polity Press, Sydney and Cambridge; R.W. Connell (1995), *Masculinities*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney and Oxford; J. Wajcman, (1991), *Feminism confronts technology*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 143, 151, 159.

however, and through this research the striking connection that emerged was the workers' continued focus on their machinery. It was the Heidelberg cylinder presses, the GMA Vikings, the Miehle Perfectas, the Rolands, the Heidelberg Speedmasters etc. that continually appeared as the vector through which press-machinists articulated their memories. The knowledge that press-machinists maintained about these large, high-powered machines enabled a continuity and transformation of masculine craft culture from hands-on technical craft into a craft of high-speed equipment, where a printers' sense of craft skill involved the possession of mechanical knowledge; knowing the quirks of a machine so well that you could 'almost run it blindfold'.

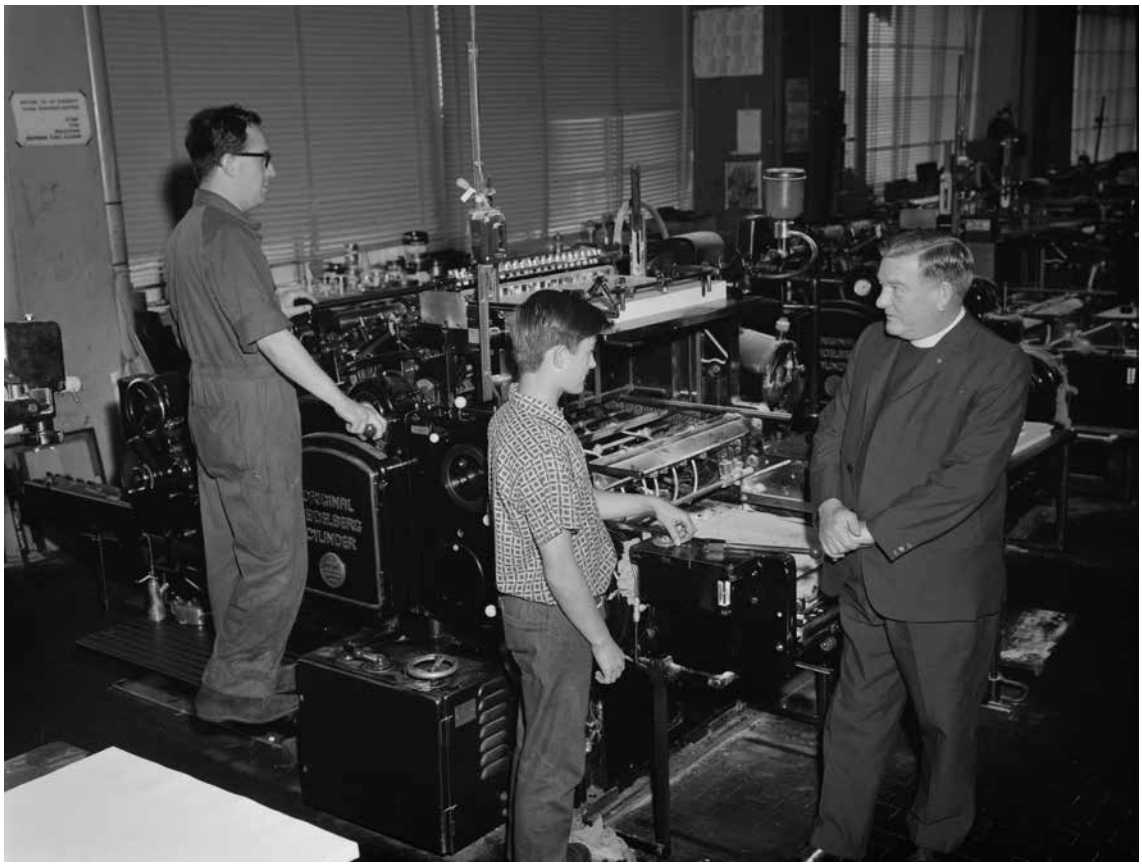

Fig. 54 **Press-machinist Ray Utick with letterpress apprentice, Dennis O'Loughlin, and a Methodist Minister, 1966**, at a Heidelberg Cylinder press. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 33643.

Existing studies focus on typesetting, not press-machining

Existing historical and sociological studies of the printing industry in the mid- to late twentieth century often emphasise how changes to typesetting technology dramatically altered perceptions of skill and gender in the printing labour process. The focus of sociological analysis has often been on compositors, that is, on the shift from hot-metal typesetting to electronic photo-typesetting.[34] Through studies by Cynthia Cockburn (among others), we have seen how the end of hot-metal fundamentally dissolved compositors' identities as skilled craftsmen. Multiple accounts have described how compositors' labour practice transformed from what was traditionally perceived as a highly skilled craft, securely placed within the domain of hegemonic masculinity, into the supposedly 'feminised' and thus undervalued practice of typing at a monitor using a qwerty keyboard.[35]

Through her analysis of the retraining of newspaper compositors on London's Fleet Street in the late 1970s,[36] Cockburn explored the way in which the definition of craft skill is interwoven into traditional conceptions of working class masculinity. Many of these compositors had been Linotype pieceworkers, skilled in hot-metal typesetting on equipment that essentially dated back to the 1890s. As Cockburn established, to change a compositor's tools and machinery of work was to challenge the very basis of his self-definition as a skilled, masculine craftsman.

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34 This scholarly emphasis on typesetting (over other aspects of printing) is noted by Frances Robertson. See F. Robertson, op. cit., p. 59. In studies of printing in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, again the emphasis often falls on controversies between typographical unions and employers, in relation to the introduction of mechanical typesetting equipment and the employment of non-unionised and/or female labour. Again, the story is told more fully for compositors than press-machinists. See for example: A. Baron, 'An "other" side of gender antagonism at work', pp. 47–69; R. Frances (1991), 'Marginal matters: Gender, skill, unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – A case study of the Australian printing industry 1925–1937', *Labour History*, no. 61, pp. 17–29; R. Frances (1993), *The politics of work: Gender and labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne; J. Hagan (1973), 'Craft power', *Labour History*, no. 24, pp. 159–75.

35 C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power', pp. 177–89; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*; Cockburn (1985), *Machinery of dominance: Women, men and technical know-how*, Pluto Press, London, Sydney, Dover; R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. 55–56; R. Hill (1984), 'From hot metal to cold type: New technology in the newspaper industry', *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 9, pp. 161–75; R. Reed (1988), 'From hot metal to cold type printing technology', in E. Willis (ed.), *Technology and the labour process: Australasian case studies*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 33–50; R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay', pp. 25–40; T.F. Rogers & N.S. Friedman (1980), *Printers face automation: The impact of technology on work and retirement among skilled craftsmen*, Lexington Books, Lexington and Toronto; M. Wallace & L. Kalleberg (1982), 'Industrial transformation and the decline of craft: the decomposition of skill in the printing industry, 1931–1978', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 307–24; A. Zimbalist (1979), 'Technology and the labor process in the printing industry', in A. Zimbalist (ed.), *Case studies on the labor process*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 103–26.

36 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*.

Before the compositing trade disappeared entirely in the mid- to late 1980s (due to the growth of desktop publishing, removing the need for a compositor to double-handle type), compositing was seen as an utterly transformed trade – from a masculine 'skilled' craft into a feminised 'clerical' role. This issue is discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

While compositors have been studied at length, less scholarly attention has been given to the related technological shift that occurred simultaneously in the printing industry; the gradual extinction of letterpress printing and the increasing dominance of offset-lithography.[37] Press-machinists had a rather different experience compared to compositors, and one that featured the reaffirmation of an idealised masculine labour process, rather than the dissolution of a craft in the face of computerisation. Sociologist Sally Hacker has described how the growth of computerisation in engineering (among other fields) prompted a remaking of masculinity centred around technical knowledge.[38] A similar case can be made for press-machinists. The continued presence of large printing machinery (albeit more automated and less 'hands-on' than letterpress) enabled press-machinists to recycle and transform older notions of craft masculinity, adding detailed technical knowledge about high-speed machinery into the craftsman's repertoire.

In 1979, the American political economist Andrew Zimbalist claimed that 'the pressroom is the only stage of the modern printing process where some traditional craft skills have been preserved'.[39] Zimbalist downplays the distinction between letterpress and lithography, regarding both processes as affected by increasing automation throughout the twentieth century. This fits the structure of his argument, as he focuses on the negative impacts of automation in the manufacturing industries. But by making this statement, Zimbalist

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37 F. Robertson, op. cit., p. 59; A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 114. While lithography has received less attention in print history, the following publications do attend to lithography and its technological transitions: E.F. Baker (1974), *Printers and technology*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut; R. Dunn, R. Hester & A. Readman (2001), 'From letterpress to offset lithography', in B. Cope & D. Kalantzis (eds), *Print and electronic text convergence*, Common Ground Publishing, Champaign, Illinois, pp. 81–108; A. Marshall, op. cit., pp. 34-42; M. Twyman, *The British Library Guide to Printing*, pp. 76-82; M. Twyman (1970), *Printing 1770–1970: An illustrated history of its development and uses in England*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London; M. Twyman, *Breaking the mould*; D. Bryans (2000), 'The double invention of printing', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 287–300.

38 S.L. Hacker (1989), *Pleasure, power and technology: Some tales of gender, engineering, and the cooperative workplace*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, p. 45.

39 A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 114.

implicitly compares press-machinists with other trades such as compositors, who were facing the introduction of electronic typesetting. Although Zimbalist's work pre-dates some of the best analysis of the gendering of compositors' work and he does not use gender as a lens through which to examine labour or technological change, the implication of this statement can still be gleaned: for compositors, their work became 'feminised' and this was seen as a process of deskilling. For press-machinists, on the other hand, their labour continued to be associated with the operation of large, heavy machinery and thus the masculinity of press-machinists was not seen to be threatened. While press-machinists may have lost some of their letterpress skills, Zimbalist does not regard them as deskilled.[40] Before this chapter moves into describing how the transition from letterpress to lithography was experienced at the Gov, it is necessary to provide some background into these two printing processes.

From letterpress to offset-lithography

From the mid-twentieth century, web-fed offset-lithography began to be seen as cheaper, faster and capable of much larger outputs than letterpress. It was first introduced by large corporate employers in newspaper and magazine printing and favoured because it theoretically required fewer workers and because of the relative ease of pairing images with text.[41] Developments in offset-lithography corresponded with contemporaneous developments in electronic typesetting technologies, hastening its popularity. By the 1970s in advanced capitalist contexts, offset-lithography had become the mainstream form of commercial printing, with letterpress increasingly relegated to embellishments such as embossing and foil stamping.[42] Before this period, letterpress had a five-hundred-year history of dominance in the industry and this history entrenched particular practices, values and identities that in some contexts proved hard to shift.

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[40] ibid.

[41] In smaller printing houses and institutions such as government printing offices, letterpress retained the association with 'proper' text-heavy printing, and it lasted longer in these factory contexts. See R. Dunn, R. Hester & A. Readman, 'From letterpress to offset lithography', p. 83; M. Twyman, *Breaking the mould*, pp. 171–73; Twyman, *Printing 1770–1970*, p. 59.

[42] R. Dunn, R. Hester & A. Readman, op. cit., p. 83; B. Cope (2001), 'New ways with words: Print and etext convergence', in B. Cope & D. Kalantzis (eds), *Print and electronic text convergence*, Common Ground Publishing, Champaign, Illinois, p. 10. While the growth of small-offset, non-unionised 'copyshops' also changed the structure, technologies, and industrial relations of the printing industry, this issue falls outside the scope of this chapter.

Fig. 55 **Offsider Joe Liberman poses with a Heidelberg cylinder press, c. late 1950s**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

Fig. 56 **Press-machinist John Wetherell works on a Heidelberg cylinder letterpress machine, 1965.** Others pictured may be Dicky Carroll and Phillip Brook. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 27294.

Letterpress is the process by which a raised surface is covered in ink and paper is pressed onto it to produce the printed image. The principle of letterpress printing dates back to Chinese printmaking methods of relief and impression in the second century AD.[43] Letterpress was not used in Western European culture until Johannes Gutenberg's creation of moveable type between 1434 and 1450. With moveable type, letterpress printing eventually had the capacity to become a modern manufacturing process and letterpress became the dominant method of printing from the thirteenth to the mid-twentieth century. While the principle of relief and impression stayed the same, faster and more automated presses were gradually introduced. Wooden screw-presses were updated with the iron Stanhope press in Britain around 1800, followed by other iron platen presses. The early nineteenth century saw the introduction of steam power into press machinery and by the second-half of the nineteenth century, mechanical replacements were being found for the hand-feeding of paper. By the beginning of the twentieth century electrical power options gradually became available.[44]

Crucially, a letterpress-machinist's labour process remained relatively 'hands-on' throughout this period, mostly because the process of setting-up the press remained highly labour-intensive and because printing presses endured as autonomous units operated by a skilled machinist, one per machine.[45] In fact, the operation of *all* industrialised printing presses – regardless of whether they are run with heavy letterpress formes or lightweight lithographic plates – requires a detailed series of steps to set up the machine before printing begins. Paper is loaded, ink levels tested and modified, pressure refined and proofs run. Much of this process is subject to the individual judgment of the press-machinist. The process of setting up a letterpress machine is traditionally known as a 'makeready'. It involves locking a letterpress forme – comprising multiple pages of composed metal type – onto the press and testing for the quality of the impression. When making-ready, the press-machinist must ensure the printing surface is perfectly flat, so that the printed impression is unified, with no areas imprinted too lightly or heavily. This involves

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[43] R. Dunn, R. Hester & A. Readman, op. cit., p. 84.

[44] M. Twyman, *Printing 1770–1970*, pp. 51–55; R. Dunn, R. Hester & A. Readman, op. cit., pp. 83–85.

[45] Depending on the size of the machine and the weight of the forme, press-machinists often had an assistant known as an 'offsider'.

padding out parts of the cylinder or flatbed with layers of blankets or damp paper patches, or adjusting the metal forme so that it is flush.[46] Even in the 1960s and 1970s, the process of a makeready on electronic letterpresses could take several hours, or sometimes a whole day of work, during which the press was in use only to run proofs.

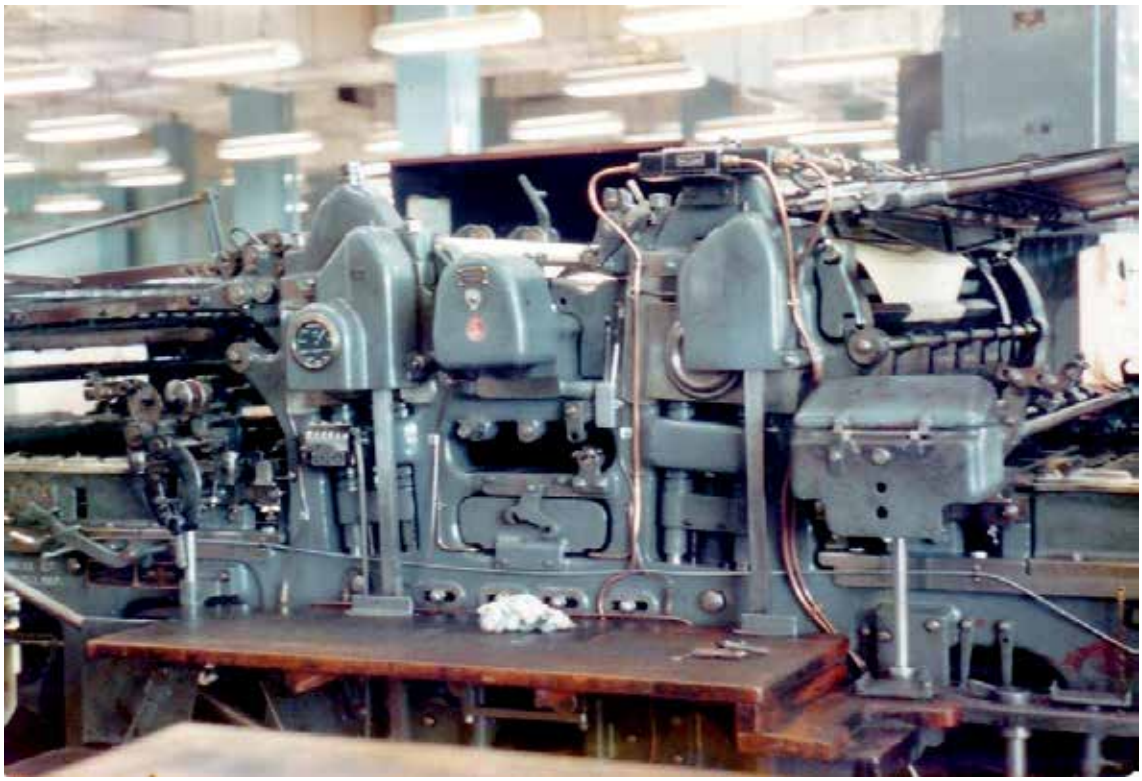

Fig. 57 **Detail of a Miehle letterpress machine**, courtesy of Glenn MacKellar. 'All cast iron and no electronics.' – Glenn MacKellar.

Many press-machinists will happily describe the makeready process in immense detail. After being asked about his recollections of apprenticeship, letterpress-machinist Victor Gunther launched into this description of the makeready process:

> Well, when I started on the machines after twelve months … from then on I was offsiding on the machines and the tradesmen'd tell you what to do and you'd do it … You'd help them makeready … see you put the formes on the machine, with all the type and blocks, and you'd take a proof of it and you'd find there's all weak spots and heavy spots. So the

[46] A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 114.

> makeready is … cutting out the heavy parts and patching it up with tissue paper in the light spots, to bring it all level … and when you took your next proof, you'd find most of it is all even.[47]

Letterpress and lithographic printer Glenn MacKellar, who was apprenticed at the Gov in 1973, described the letterpress makeready process in a reverent tone:

> It was a very dark environment in these machines. Very dark, cumbersome sort of machine. To set it up, you'd put your paper in the front end and set it up to run through ok <pause> and then you'd have to do what's known as a 'makeready'. That was just varying amounts of paper in the packaging, to get it to all print evenly. <pause> A real good printer, of top skill, would be able to do all of that and it would be so nice that when you turned over and looked at the back of the sheet, you could see the impression of type on the back. He had it *just* right. And it could take hours to get right.[48]

The makeready meant that a letterpress machinist retained considerable control over the pace of his output, and this was the part of the labour process that press-machinists tend to go into the most detail about. Like the nineteenth century shoe lasters described by Irwin Yellowitz, the specific hand skills required in the makeready gave these press-machinists an edge, a golden chip for union bargaining, and a strong sense of accomplished craft skill.[49]

Printing historian Dennis Bryans observed that the history of printing is in fact two separate histories operating alongside one another, with lithography often being forgotten and letterpress history receiving more attention.[50] He emphasises – along with printing historian Michael Twyman – that the history of lithography is not exclusively a twentieth-century

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[47] Victor Gunther, interview with author, 15 August 2012.

[48] Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011.

[49] I. Yellowitz (1977), 'Skilled workers and mechanisation', *Labor History*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 197–213.

[50] D. Bryans, op. cit., pp. 287–88.

story.[51] Lithography dates back to an invention by playwright and actor Alois Senefelder in Munich in 1799 that made use of the chemical separation of oil and water. The lithographic process prints from a flat surface rather than from a raised one, and originally it involved producing an image on a stone in greasy ink. The grease attracted the ink, while the other areas of the stone were wet, repelling ink.

Fig. 58 **Press-machinist Ray Utick setting up the Lotto machines (lithographic), no date.** Courtesy of Ray Utick.

[51] M. Twyman, *Printing 1770–1970*; M. Twyman, *Breaking the mould*; D. Bryans, op. cit.

In terms of mechanical developments, however, it was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that a powered lithographic press was engineered. Printing from stone was cumbersome and could not be easily adapted for rotary printing, but from the late nineteenth century experiments began in printing from tin plates. In the early twentieth century, *offset*-lithography was developed in both the United Kingdom and the United States; the process involves the transfer of the image from a metal plate onto another surface – usually a cylinder – and from there the image is offset onto paper. From the mid-twentieth century, offset-lithography increasingly used light-sensitised, lightweight metal plates (often aluminium), making the method more affordable and easily adapted to mass production.

Rivalry between letterpress and lithographic printers was commonplace at the Gov, with each trade believing their method to be superior. While lithographers saw their letterpress counterparts as 'behind the times', letterpress printers maintained that they were the traditional craftsmen of printing, claiming that letterpress required more skill.[52] Compared to the heavy work undertaken by a letterpress printer, the labour process for a lithographic press-machinist could be less physically demanding and faster-paced than letterpress. While press-machinists still had to makeready on a lithographic machine, the process was quicker, and they did so by setting up a relatively lightweight plate onto the press, rather than an unwieldy letterpress forme.[53]

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[52] Letterpress and lithographic printers have maintained a long-standing rivalry. In the mid-twentieth century in Australia, lithographers were paid at a higher rate than letterpress machinists, at least in commercial industry. At the Gov, however, letterpress printers were rewarded with high pay, while lithographers felt undervalued by their employers, both financially and in terms of the machines they were tasked with running. In 1957, labour historian Elizabeth Faulkner Baker accounted for the experience of American press-machinists in the context of the development of the American Pressmen's Union. Baker noted new printing technologies in lithography led to a splintering of press-machinists into specialised trades in the first half of the twentieth century, with the lithographers organising separately from letterpress printers. See E.F. Baker, op. cit., p. 15.

[53] The physical practice of making-ready on a lithographic press could still be physically challenging, however, as it sometimes involved reaching up high to tighten bolts and climbing onto equipment. See Chapter Eight for more discussion of this issue.

Letterpress loyalty

Letterpress machinists had a variety of responses to the arrival of lithography into their technical realm, ranging from total resistance to contented acceptance of new technologies. Only a few letterpress printers at the Gov viewed the introduction of lithography as the 'death knell' of their trade, and most – concerned for their job survival – were keen to retrain. For those who resisted this technological change, letterpress was more than a skill: it was an entire world that they could manually command. This statement echoes Cockburn's findings in her study of Linotype operators. Cockburn describes a similar sense of attachment, pride and interactive knowledge of machinery; she explains how working with metal brought a 'special satisfaction', and that there was a 'pride in knowing how to do physically heavy work without hurting yourself'.[54] Working as a printer enabled you to see tangible results, giving the printer the 'satisfaction of seeing, handling and measuring his output'.[55] Cockburn is referring here to compositors, but her description of this embodied attachment to machinery could comfortably be applied to press-machinists. Control was a crucial factor. Letterpress machines could be swift, but they operated at a rate where the letterpress operator felt in control, a concept that was tied to their belief in their skill. With the introduction of faster offset-lithographic machines, the risk of matters getting 'out of control' could seem greater.[56] The steady, mechanical quality of letterpress was key to some press-operators' self-identity and relinquishing such tangible control could be painful and frightening.

Letterpress-machinist Norm Rigney, who was apprenticed at the Gov in 1964, explained that although he undertook training in lithography in the late 1970s, he had no desire to work on lithographic machines. Once letterpress was phased out at the Gov, he took a position in scheduling. In the following extended passage, Norm gradually explains his feelings about letterpress and why he did not want to retrain:

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54 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 48, 51.

55 ibid., p. 54.

56 M. Braundy (2011), *Men, women & tools: Bridging the divide*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax & Winnipeg, p. 78.

Norm: We had a job for life, you know, and you were lucky. Lucky. We *chose* to go to the Government Printing Office, because in those days you could *choose* to go anywhere. I chose to be a letterpress printer. But that's what I wanted to do. I thought that it was in my blood, but I really don't know. I think history is more in my blood than anything. But … oh … the blokes and everybody, I loved 'em. I really did … All great. We respected each other and helped each other. They taught you to drink, they taught you to, you know, taught you everything. It was great … I always <pause> I never ever thought that letterpress would finish, I don't suppose. I really had no interest. And if you've got no interest, you really don't want to be retrained in that. And it was my job.

Jesse: But you didn't mind giving up your trade work?

Norm: No. <pause> Well, I could see it was goin'. And I had to <pause> and I didn't want to retrain, I really didn't.

Jesse: Why didn't you want to retrain?

Norm: Because I had no interest in it. You had to be interested in it. You really had to be focused and interested and I was not at all. I liked the old fashioned way of doing things. I liked the old mechanics. It was the mechanical side of things that I loved. It was the feel of the old presses, and <pause> the smells and the feel of what you were doing. You've got more of a … satisfaction out of being a letterpress printer, than what you did being a litho printer. It was satisfaction for me, because I loved it, I really did love it. That was why … When I was a letterpress printer I was never so fit! The formes we used to throw onto the machines – they were heavy. It was an *absolute* pleasure, as I say. Hard work, I never ever worried about working overtime, or anything like that, if we had to do anything. Working Saturdays, all that sort of thing.[57]

[57] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012. Italics indicate speaker's emphasis.

Crucially, Norm's attachment to letterpress is tied both to his specific commitment to the Gov, and his attachment to the aesthetic and mechanical qualities of letterpress. He continues:

> My *beloved* Government Printing Office. I used to think of it as my own, as did a lot of the fellows that worked there. We were absolutely, you know, Government Printing Office through and through. And we were long term … I was a Grade 1 Machinist, and I loved printing, the old fashioned style of printing. We had *beautiful* machines. It was an absolute privilege for me to work there, and I worked there for 25 years.[58]

Put another way, Norm's dedication to the materiality of letterpress printing is intertwined with his devotion to the Government Printing Office as an institution, and all this, in turn, is connected to his sense of masculinity and his social standing with his male peers. He sees himself as being in a privileged social position that was inherited from his ancestor, George Howe, who was the second government printer of the colony of NSW in 1800.[59]

Press-machinists working at the Gov in the second half of the twentieth century often came from families of printers. Their fathers, grandfathers and in a few cases great-grandfathers had also been printers, sometimes specifically *government* printers. Ray Utick is another example of generational connection to the Government Printing Office. His great-grandfather Edward John Davis [Fig. 59] worked as an engineer-fitter at the old Government Printing Office at Phillip and Bent streets for 29 years, retiring in 1917.[60] Ray's grandfather Ernest Alfred Davis worked at the Government Printing Office as a clerk, and his position enabled Ray to get an apprenticeship in press-machining. This patriarchal notion of inherited social standing and skill was in existence well into the twentieth century; it was not simply a relic of the nineteenth century.[61]

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[58] ibid.

[59] George Howe was a convict and printer who arrived in the NSW Colony in 1800, and printed material for the colonial government until his death in 1821. His son Robert Howe became the third Government Printer of colonial NSW. See J.V. Byrnes (1966), *George Howe (1769–1821)*, Melbourne University Press, viewed 29 July 2013, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/howe-george-1600/text2851.

[60] 'Ray Utick', *Staff News*, NSW Government Printing Office staff journal, December 1980, p. 7.

[61] Cockburn also observed this pattern in relation to London's Fleet Street compositors. See C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 44. For a parallel in engineering, see: R. Oldenziel, *Making technology masculine*, p. 59.

Fig. 59 **The Mechanical Room at the old Government Printing Office at Phillip & Bent streets, 1891.** The man in the middle facing right is Ray Utick's great grandfather, Edward John Davis. Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 1 – 08362. With thanks to Richard Peck and Ray Utick.

Lithography infiltrates the Main Pressroom

While many press-machinists at the Gov were prepared to embrace the change to lithography, the identity-affirming closeness with machinery remained a major factor for both letterpress and lithographic machinists. The process of learning new machinery – grasping it in detail – was a theme that the interviewees consistently returned to. George Larden began working as a letterpress machinist at the Gov in 1932. During World War II he worked in the Australian Air Force, chiefly as an instructor in technical training for military aircraft, after which he returned to the Gov and worked again as a press-machinist. He summarised his experience – in both printing and the Air Force – in specific terms of technical knowledge. For George, both press-machining and Air Force instruction was a process of learning specific machinery in detail, from one machine to another:

> Altogether I enjoyed all my working days. I think I had an engineering mind in the first place. And when I seen the automatic machinery in the printing, I think the machinery got me in … [The Air Force] kept me as an instructor. <pause> We had to set the syllabus for the Beaufort Bomber. They only had one set of manuals and that was at the factory. So I used to have to go down there and study it to get enough knowledge to set the syllabus. And then when the Mosquito came along I did the same again. I think I spent all my working days *learning*.[62]

The act of learning new machinery was not necessarily perceived as 'deskilling' or loss, but it could also function to reinforce the sense of masculine technical mastery. This dynamic opens up a way to see how, in a factory context, management could manipulate messages about why workers had to retrain; if retraining was associated with skill acquisition, masculinity and craft tradition, then the shift from one type of machinery to another was less likely to cause embittered and resistant reactions from workers.

The introduction of offset-lithography into the Main Pressroom at the Gov required negotiation with the PKIU and involved the redefinition of trade demarcations.[63] The gradual incursion of lithography into the Main Pressroom resulted in a peculiar array of workplace practices, including decisions that to an outsider might seem illogical. In 1977 the Gov acquired two offset-lithographic Heidelberg ZP11 Speedmasters and the letterpress machines known as GMAs were decommissioned. [Fig. 60] The Speedmasters were the first lithographic presses to be installed in the letterpress section. PKIU's demarcation rules initially meant that the Speedmasters were 'off-limits' to all letterpress-machinists.[64]

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[62] George Larden, interview with author, 14 March 2013. Italics indicate speaker's emphasis.

[63] G.F. Smith, op. cit., p. 6.

[64] ibid., p. 3.

Fig. 60 **Printers and engineers pose with the brand new Heidelberg ZP11 Speedmasters, 1977**. Promotional photograph taken for Seligson & Clare, distributors of Heidelberg. The engineers are in overalls, the printers are (from left): Glenn MacKellar, Leo Duncan and Graeme Gould. Courtesy of Glenn MacKellar.

Technologies are not always used to their full capacity, nor are they always used in the way their designers may intend. Just because a technological system is newer and faster in theory does not guarantee efficiency or improvement in practice. New machinery is often modified to suit existing cultural conventions and social practices are built up around disruptive objects. Disruptive and untouchable (for all but a few tradesmen), the Speedmasters represented the new world of offset-lithography, a trade that threatened to make letterpress-machinists redundant.

In a response to the perceived threat of lithography, the Speedmasters were initially rebuilt so that they could handle letterpress plates, using a process known as 'dry offset'. The process used a printing plate with a raised surface, meaning that letterpress principles and work practices remained.[65] In effect, the Gov retrograded two brand new presses. The use of dry offset was an

[65] 'Nyloprint, A versatile new process' (1977), *NSW Government Printing Office Staff News*, March, p. 3.

unusual adaptation, particularly because it resulted in poorer printing quality, but it meant the Speedmasters could be operated by letterpress-machinists.[66] It did not seem to matter that the printing quality suffered; the PKIU demanded the adjustment because it protected letterpress-machinists' jobs, and management complied.

In 1977, when the new presses first arrived, the Speedmasters had not settled into what science and technology studies (STS) and actor-network theorists might call a 'black box'.[67] The Speedmasters remained disruptive objects, with an unclear status in terms of who ought to be allied with them. By 1980 an industrial agreement that simplified trade demarcations was finalised, enabling letterpress-machinists to use lithographic presses and, in theory, vice versa.[68] Old ownerships of machinery began to disintegrate. The changing of the award distinctions, and the retrograding of the Speedmasters into pseudo-letterpress machines, made these machines safe, and allowed the machines to enrol others (former letterpress-machinists), so that eventually the Speedmasters' presence came to be less controversial and more accepted.[69]

Press-machinists who were specifically allied to the Speedmasters had a more positive experience than others. Glenn MacKellar is from a younger generation than some of the other printers interviewed for this project. His perception was that the transition from letterpress to lithography was not a major problem for the workers:

> There wasn't a lot of resistance from most of the rank and file, they saw it as something different. It made a big difference in terms of speed.[70]

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66 G.F. Smith, op. cit., p. 3.

67 L. Winner (1993), 'Upon opening the black box and finding it empty: Social constructivism and the philosophy of technology', *Science, technology and human values*, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 365; B. Latour (1987), *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society,* Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p. 258.

68 Existing letterpress machinists were reclassified 'Printing Machinist Classification A,' and, perhaps in a hint of the Gov's letterpress bias, lithographers were reclassified as 'Printing Machinist Classification B, Grade I'. This meant that press-machinists could also use flexographic and gravure presses. Separate compositor demarcations (hand compositor, monotype operator, linotype operator, copy-marker, etc.) were also simplified as 'Compositor' under various classifi-cations. Agreement #2268 of 1980: between the Public Service Board of the State of NSW and the Printing and Kindred Industries Union, 21 March 1980; Don West, 'Printing Staff Agreement', *Staff Circular* 47, 1 May 1980. Both documents at NSW State Records, Sydney, Government Printing Office, General Correspondence Files container #18/2091.

69 C. Cockburn (1992), 'The circuit of technology: Gender, identity and power', in R. Silverstone, and E. Hirsch (eds), *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 34.

70 Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011.

When Glenn commenced his apprenticeship in letterpress-machining in 1973, he already had some lithographic knowledge from previous technical education. This combination of skills meant that in 1980 Glenn was easily able to switch between the two methods. He explained:

> [The Speedmasters] were specially built to take a rotary letterpress plate … But the union wouldn't allow them to operate as lithographic printing machines … The machine had a special undercut, and we used to put letterpress printing plates on them, and run them as letterpress machines, or 'dry-offset', as we call it. We did that until about 1980 when we were allowed to convert them over to litho. So, into the cupboard we went, and got all the litho printing bits that had to get on them, and bolted 'em all on. And I was on the first one … They were just litho printing machines after that. The modernisation just continued from then on.[71]

Glenn situates the dry-offset adjustment as central to the narrative of the arrival of the Speedmasters, a story he frames around the notion of technological 'modernisation'. Again, the press itself is central to Glenn's interpretation of his working history:

> The Speedmaster that I got – it was just a beautiful piece of equipment. It just ran and ran like a Swiss watch. And the one next to it – everyone that went on it – it just used to stop all the time. It just wasn't the same. And people used to say, 'Oh that Glenn MacKellar, he's a good printer, look, his machine's runnin' beautiful.' But then I went on [the one next to it] one day, and I don't know, it's just like cars, you know there's something about them? Well, it's just something about it, it just wasn't the same as the one that I got. They all had their own little behavioural characteristics.[72]

Notwithstanding Glenn's desire not to 'big-note' himself, this anecdote still indicates how his thorough, embodied knowledge of one particular machine lent legitimacy to his identity as a skilled printer, regardless of which printing method was in use. Again, it is the machine itself, not the printed product, which was central to the experience.

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71 ibid.

72 ibid.

Press-machinists' focus on machinery

Fig. 61 **The bus ticket machine in the Revenue Room, fourth floor, no date**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

Although press-machinists can be reticent about discussing their working life in detail, there are, on occasion, other (non-verbal) ways that they communicate what was important to them. The press-machinist Ray Utick maintained an amateur photographic and filmmaking practice while he worked at the Gov. He retrained in lithography and claims he had little difficulty adapting to the new method. Ray began taking photographs at the Gov as an apprentice (see for example figs. 61–63) and when asked what he took photographs of, Ray replied obliquely:

> 'Oh, just machines, and people on the machines. Just average things.'[73]

[73] Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

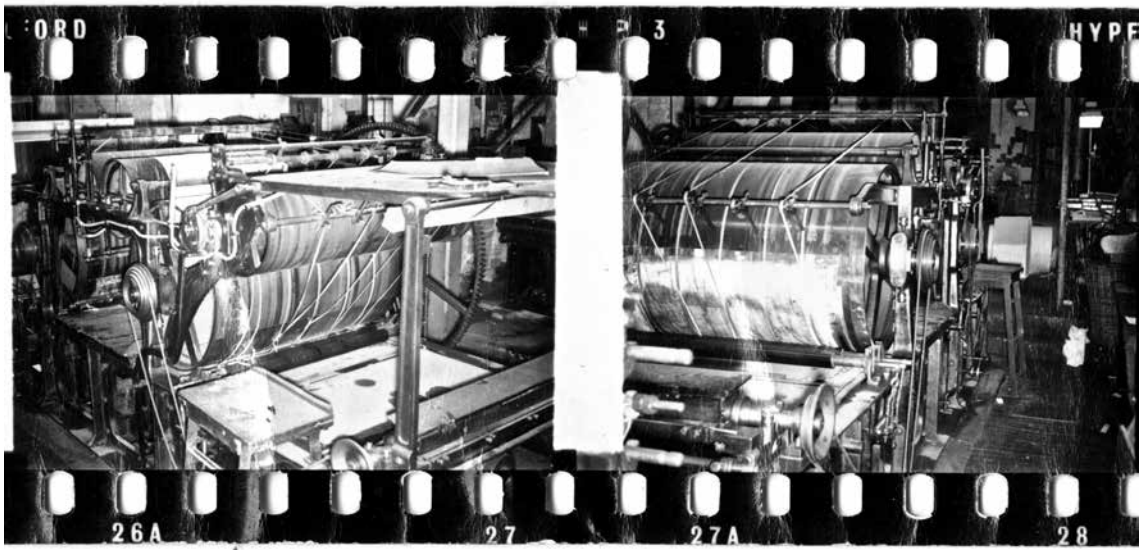

Fig. 62 **Old letterpress Perfecta machines 'headed for the scrapheap', late 1950s**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

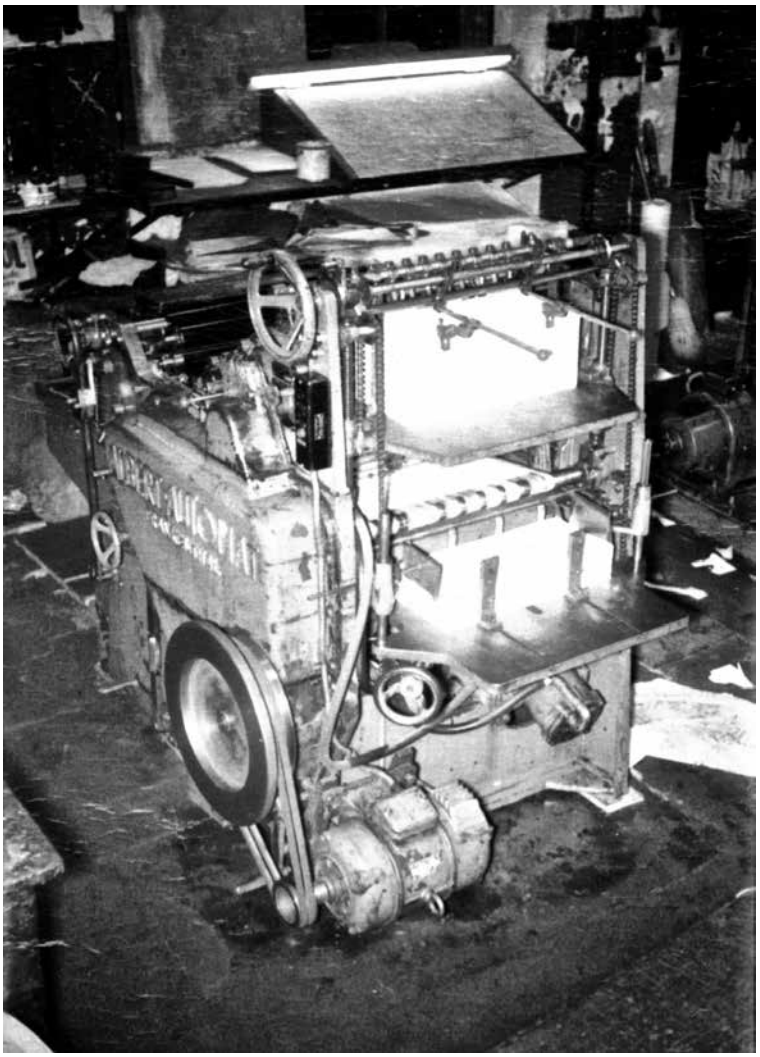
Fig. 63 **Albert Automat, no date**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

The main theme of Ray's photographs taken at the Gov is close-up images of presses. When I interviewed him, Ray methodically went through his own photographs and named each press aloud:

> This is the Albert Automat, a small letterpress machine. This is a Heidelberg Platen. This one is Warwick Richardson working on the Centurion. <pause> These are two small Wharfdale machines in the Pressroom on the third floor, western side. <pause> This is the Pressroom, third floor, eastern side, with the Miehle Perfecta <pause> These are the Heidelberg cylinders in the new building [continues].[74]

This almost singular focus on machinery is not something Ray developed later in life. In 1966 Ray made an 8mm silent colour film, and titled it *Letterpress Machines of the Government Printing Office*.[75] [Fig. 64] The film shows a variety of letterpress machines in use at the Gov, and it was shot on the sly, during working hours:

> That was one Saturday. I should've been watching my machine all the time. But I started it going, made sure there was plenty of ink in it, and then I used to run around the different spots and do the film.[76]

When interviewed, Ray explained how he had digitised his 8.5mm film in 2012, and he played it back on his television. He expressed pleasure in having digitised the film successfully, which suggests that Ray's pride in technical skill is something that has mutated almost seamlessly from letterpress technics to digital electronics. Ray proudly beckoned me to take a look at the back of his television, where a myriad of cables and wires were neatly and successfully connected: DVD, VHS, cable TV, satellite dish, etc.

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[74] ibid.

[75] This 6-minute colour film was originally silent, although in recent years Utick added a musical background: *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the symphonic poem by Paul Dukas.

[76] Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

Fig. 64 **Film stills from Ray Utick's *Letterpress machines of the New South Wales Government Printing Office*, 1966,** 8mm colour film, 6 minutes. Courtesy of Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

Most frames in *Letterpress Machines* are shots of machinery, filmed at close range. Few people appear in the film, and it is hard to catch a glimpse of the whole pressroom, owing to the focus on the moving machinery. As we watched the *Letterpress Machines* film, the discussion of technics returned to the letterpress era, and Ray described how he removed the safety guards from one press so as to get a better camera angle. As the title suggests, *Letterpress Machines of the Government Printing Office* places the presses as the central characters in a story of technological achievement. Again, Ray named each press aloud. When one man appeared in the frame, Ray said, 'Get outta the way!'

Ray's photographs and films – like the detailed descriptions of presses given by other press-machinists – tell us much more than factual matter of which press is which. The unstated but implicit value here is that being a press-machinist is about craft skill and it is about the

aesthetics of printing, but not its aesthetics on paper. It is about the movement, rhythm and form of presses in action. It is about the sensual absorption and pleasures to be found in the smooth and efficient running of large technical artefacts.[77] Of course, the end result mattered (that's what made you a good printer), but this press-machinist's focus is almost completely on the presses themselves. It was about the hard work and craft of the makeready, all satisfyingly coming to fruition once the press was turned on. Everything is captured and named, and in this way a certain repossession is taking place. This is a quiet reclaiming of past 'glory' in working life, a methodical listing of machinery, as if to affirm its significance in the narrative of the skilled, masculine, craftsman printer.

Here is a case where the increasing automation of the production process did not initially lead to the perceived degradation of craft tradition in the labour process. Taking on the role of technical specialists, press-machinists were able to assert control over newer lithographic technologies and in the process they reoriented their craft skill toward new machinery.[78] As labour historian Paul Willis has said:

> Although distinctions must be made for region and occupation, the absolutely central thing about working-class culture of the shop floor is … that, despite the dispossession, despite the bad conditions, despite the external directions … people do look for meaning, they do impose frameworks, they do seek enjoyment in activity, they do exercise their abilities … This culture is not the human remains of a mechanical depredation but a positive transformation of experience and a celebration of shared values in symbols, artefacts and objects.[79]

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[77] T. Kleif & W. Faulkner (2003), ' "I'm no athlete (but) I can make this thing dance": Men's pleasures in technology', *Science, Technology and Human Values*, vol. 28, no. 2, p. 298.

[78] This dynamic is not dissimilar to the way in which hand compositors in the 1890s faced the introduction of the Linotype machine. As Shields writes, compositors were able to 'preserve the regime of social exclusion' and take up control over the new technologies, 'leaving a substantial area of traditional craft work in tact'. See J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 8.

[79] P. Willis (1979), 'Shop floor culture, masculinity, and the wage form', in J. Clarke, C. Critcher & R. Johnson (eds), *Working-class culture: Studies in history and theory*, Hutchinson, in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham, London, p. 188.

For these press-machinists, their shared values, symbols and artefacts were centred around both the technical mastery of presses *and* a historical connection to the past – a duality that enabled the traditional and patriarchal notion of craft masculinity to coexist with technological change. But this coexistence was short-lived. Although the Gov adapted and to some extent became a high-speed lithographic printing house in the 1980s, with the closure of the Gov in 1989 the press-machinists faced the hurdle of finding work elsewhere. The presses were sold at auction or torn apart for scrap metal. Australian printeries continued to close as cheaper markets became available in Asia and as print media declined in favour of online and digital mediums. The following chapter returns to this 1970s – 1980s period of technological upheaval, this time considering another trade: the compositors.

5. Hot-metal to cold type: history & scholarship

Fig. 65 **Compositors Robert Garside, Bob Bonnano, Ray Bannon and Chris Shay pose at the imposition slab, 1981**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 14689.

Introduction: myths about technological change

This chapter outlines some of the existing scholarship and arguments pertaining to the technological shift from hot-metal typesetting to computerised photo-typesetting, or 'cold type'. As well as providing the historical background to this transition, it outlines the theoretical arguments made about compositors and technological change in sociology and labour history and relates this back to the Gov's compositors. With this grounding, the following chapter (Chapter Six) provides a closer analysis of the final generation of compositors who underwent this technological conversion at the Gov; those who embraced computerisation and those who resisted it.

The outlay of new technologies into industrial contexts is often accompanied by a gamut of myths and positivist explanations. Technological determinism often engenders narratives that justify the introduction of new technologies into the labour process. In popular media and everyday parlance, a dominant historical narrative about change in the printing industry prevails; it says that a major technological rupture occurred between the 1960s and the 1980s.[1] This transformation of the printing industry is often presented in a technologically determinist sense, that is, computers are perceived to have 'taken over' typesetting in the printing industry, almost as if by their own volition. In this view of technological change, anything that happened to workers or to production is framed as 'inevitable' and therefore not worthy of analysis; computers arrived, hot-metal typesetting and letterpress printing were rendered obsolete, end of story.

The claim that technological innovation improved working conditions has been consistently used by employers to justify introducing technologies that sped up the production process and enabled management to have more control over the labour process.[2] The benefits of

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1 E.C. Bennett (1979), *New technology and the Australian printing industry*, Printing and Kindred Industries Union, Sydney; A. Marshall (1983), *Changing the word: The printing industry in transition*, Comedia Publishing Group, London; F. Robertson (2013), *Print culture: From steam press to ebook*, Routledge, London & New York; M. Shmith (2011), 'Long way from hot metal: the changing face of newspapers', *the Age*, 31 May, viewed 1 October 2013, http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/long-way-from-hot-metal-the-changing-face-of-newspapers-20110530-1fcvt.html#ixzz1NyvKJgw5; J. Bingham (2012), 'The innovative typesetter', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October, visited 1 October 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/comment/obituaries/the-innovative-typesetter-20121009-27b49.html.

2 R. Frances (1993), *The politics of work: Gender and labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne, pp. 1–3.

automation have been critiqued by sociologists and labour historians since the 1970s. Harry Braverman's influential 1974 publication *Labor and monopoly capital* argued that automation and technological innovation on the shop floor led to 'deskilling' and the degradation of craft labour in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] While many subsequent studies have argued that Braverman idealised the craftsman, that his definition of skill was bound by traditional notions about masculinity and patriarchal privilege and that he did not sufficiently account for worker resistance,[4] Braverman's studies still have a significant place in sociological and labour history interpretations of this period in the printing industry. The issue of skill and deskilling is paramount, and interpretations of what constitutes skill will be discussed further on. Despite academic critiques, however, technologically determinist interpretations still prevail in mainstream and workplace discussions about technological change. Let us consider this phenomenon at the Gov.

In a press release in 1985, the Government Printing Office's marketing section described the new technologies being introduced at the Gov, adding that the employees had broadly lent their support to computerisation:

> An important aspect of the technological change was the level of support given by employees … They have realised that emerging technologies, which are the main forces causing change, must be recognised and incorporated into traditional work procedures.[5]

The framing of technologies as the 'main forces causing change' reveals a technologically determinist view about how evolving networks of technologies and people operate throughout history. Technologically determinist views such as this ignore the role of capital and the relations of production, obscuring the changing power dynamics that evolve between technologies,

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[3] H. Braverman (1998 [1974]), *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York.

[4] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, pp. 1–4; R. Reed (1988), 'From hot metal to cold type printing technology', in E. Willis (ed.), *Technology and the labour process: Australasian case studies*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 33.

[5] 'New technology at the Government Printing Office' (1985), press release. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2105, NSW State Records, Sydney.

workers, managers, resources and bureaucratic organisations.[6] This sort of view also fails to acknowledge how technologies can be mobilised against workers and in the interests of employers, in order to reduce labour costs, increase profits and regain control over the production process; in other words, wrest that control away from trade unions. This view also overlooks the way in which workers' experience of the labour process may be degraded and undermined by newer machinery, which is deployed in a way that makes embodied specialist skill and 'know-how' redundant.[7]

The notion that computers 'took over' the composing side of the printing industry also overlooks the way in which newer technologies operated socially. The computer's introduction into the socio-technical world of the Gov profoundly altered long-established perceptions of class, camaraderie and technical expertise, as well as transforming everyday experiences of material culture and working life. It essentially transformed substantial parts of the factory into offices, and the ramifications of that transition go well beyond surface indicators such as the introduction of workstation cubicles and ergonomic office furniture. The change also produced another kind of worker; a worker who was an individual operator, who took responsibility for his or her own technical training; a technological expert, and one who found him or herself involved in increasingly precarious work situations. For interpretive clarity, the following two sections explain the historical and technical details pertaining to typesetting technologies in the printing industry.

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[6] D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman (1999 [1985]), 'Introduction: Technological determinism and production', in D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman (eds), *The social shaping of technology*, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, pp. 141–50; C. Cockburn (1992), 'The circuit of technology: Gender, identity and power', in R. Silverstone and E. Hirsch (eds), *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 32–33; L. Winner (1986), *The whale and the reactor: A search for limits in an age of high technology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, pp. 20–21.

[7] A. Zimbalist (1979), 'Introduction', in A. Zimbalist (ed.), *Case studies on the labor process*, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. xii–xx.

From hand-setting to Linotype:

Movable type is a form of printing technology that was in use in various forms for almost 500 years, from the late fifteenth century to the late twentieth century.[8] *Composition* refers to the process of producing and assembling metal movable type into lines, pages and formes, ready for printing by the letterpress method. From the invention of movable type in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century, compositors learned to set each letter of a publication nimbly by hand, placing metal or wooden characters, letter by letter (in mirror image) using a tool known as a composing stick.[9] From there, the type was placed into a *galley* (unformatted printer's proof). Once the compositor had typeset the page – full of individual letters and spaces – it was tied up tightly using metal and wooden *furniture* and held together into a page. After being proofread, a number of pages (often eight or 16) would be arranged carefully on a large flat slab to make up a *forme*. In a process known as *imposition*, a compositor would ensure that the pages were assembled in a way that allowed accurate directional flow for paper folding and cutting. Once the imposition proofs were approved, galleys would be locked together in a heavy *chase* (or frame), ready for *makeready* (placement on a letterpress machine, for testing the impression).

This is a simplified description of the typesetting and letterpress pre-press processes, and it is provided to indicate how labour-intensive the typesetting process was. It also indicates how much manual control compositors could have over their work. Composing rooms had their own unique culture, language and even smells, as expressively described by journalist Michael Shmith, reflecting on the composing room of the *Age*:

> The grease-kitchen dog-hostel aroma was the same … All in a space of steel, metal, lead and wet paper that looked like a cross between a hospital kitchen and an armaments factory, and smelt like a cross between a foundry and a weather shelter for saturated dogs.[10]

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[8] There has been a limited revival of interest in letterpress in some art and design communities. Its use is restricted to things such as limited-runs, art prints, invitations, embossing, etc. I will leave the analysis of this to other researchers.

[9] Also known as a setting stick. A. Marshall, op. cit., p. 10; A. Zimbalist, 'Technology and the labor process in the printing industry', in op. cit., pp. 105–06; R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 58.

[10] Shmith, op. cit.

Fig. 66 **General Composing Room at the Government Printing Office, third floor, 1959.** This photograph was taken shortly after the new building opened in February 1959. The fluorescent lights were at the time seen as a major advance in the quality of the working environment. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 13650.

The handcrafted nature of the printing process led sociologist Robert Blauner to conclude, in an oft-quoted line from 1964, that the printer was 'almost the prototype of the non-alienated worker in modern industry'.[11] Historian John Murphy has noted that printers had the sense that they were building up skills throughout their lifetimes and this sense of constant, ongoing learning enabled them to maintain high self-esteem, as well as pleasure and gratification through their work.[12] This pride and self-esteem were often reinforced by the strong collective control that compositors had over the pre-press labour process, mobilised through rigorous trade unionism and restrictions over apprenticeship numbers.[13]

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[11] R. Blauner (1964), *Alienation and freedom: The factory worker and his industry*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, cited in T.F. Rogers & N.S. Friedman (1980), *Printers face automation: The impact of technology on work and retirement among skilled craftsmen*, Lexington Books, Lexington and Toronto, p. 1. Blauner believed that new technologies would improve the labour experience of printers, not degrade their work and was criticised by Andrew Zimbalist for this view, see A. Zimbalist, op. cit., pp. xii, 103.

[12] J. Murphy (2005), 'Work in a time of plenty: Narratives of men's work in post-war Australia', *Labour History*, vol. 88, May, p. 225.

[13] A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 103.

Fig. 67 **Apprentice compositor Les Davies, 1967**, photographed hand-setting type for an apprentice recruitment publication. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 34806.

The compositor's hand-skill offered palpable rewards, among them the feeling of being in full control of your own craft and the ability to see and touch the results of your labour. In oral history interviews, the Gov's compositors regularly spoke of the material pleasures of typesetting. Former compositor Geoff Hawes, who was apprenticed in hand and machine composing in 1967, described a sense of satisfaction, pride and the will to work in the hand-typesetting process:

> Geoff: It was not something you did because you had to do it. You had to *want* to do it. And we did, most of the guys did. We did the trade because we wanted to do it, and we enjoyed it.
>
> *Jesse: What was satisfying about it?*
>
> Geoff: Oh, I think it was because it was so manual. At the end of the day you see something and it's on the machine getting printed, and you think, 'Gee, I put that together!' … I just liked the whole thing with working with type. I loved it. I loved the ink on my hands, you know?[14]

The materiality and physical nature of the work was a crucial part of a compositor's identity. 'Working with metal brings a special satisfaction', says Cockburn, 'the metallic nature of the product is satisfying in itself'.[15] Here, Cockburn quotes an unnamed compositor, who reiterates Geoff's sentiment, although this man was speaking more than 30 years earlier:

> You could feel you were involved with a base material, creating something out of it like a carpenter with wood … there's a weight behind it … and you feel as if you've achieved something.[16]

Before the introduction of computer typesetting in the 1970s, the compositor's labour process underwent one other dramatic technological change. This occurred in the late nineteenth century, and it involved the introduction of hot-metal typesetting machines, such as Linotype

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[14] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

[15] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 49, 51.

[16] ibid., p. 51.

Fig. 68 **The Linotype Room at the new Government Printing Office, 1959**. Many of these machines remained in use at the Government Printing Office well into the mid-1980s. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 13671.

and Monotype, into the compositors' technical repertoire.[17] With the mid-nineteenth century growth in demand for newspapers, pamphlets and books, hand-typesetting and type founding came to be seen as the 'bottleneck' in the printing process.[18] The German-born inventor Ottmar Mergenthaler acquired a United States patent for his new mechanical typesetting machine in 1886, known as the Linotype machine.[19] By 1900 there were 4000 Mergenthaler Linotypes in the United States and the Linotype arrived in Australia's composing rooms in 1894.[20]

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[17] A. Marshall, op. cit., p. 23. While most commentators on the history of the printing industry agree that the Linotype was a major technological transition in the industry, Raelene Frances has observed that the printing industry also experienced rapid technological development in the areas of binding, folding and gluing, with machinery introduced between the 1880s and 1920s requiring a new type of labour in the form of machine 'feeders'. See R. Frances (1991), 'Marginal matters: Gender, skill, unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – A case study of the Australian printing industry 1925–1937', *Labour History*, no. 61, pp. 18–19. Frances' implication is that because these technological changes related more to non-indentured workers, especially to women, they were not the focus of earlier labour histories.

[18] A. Marshall, op. cit., p. 22; D. Bryans (1996), 'The beginnings of type founding in Sydney: Alexander Thompson's type, his foundry and his exports to inter-colonial printers', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 75–86.

[19] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, p. 27.

[20] A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 106; J. Shields (1995), 'Deskilling revisited: Continuity and change in craft work and apprenticeship in late nineteenth century New South Wales', *Labour History*, vol. 68, May, p. 8.

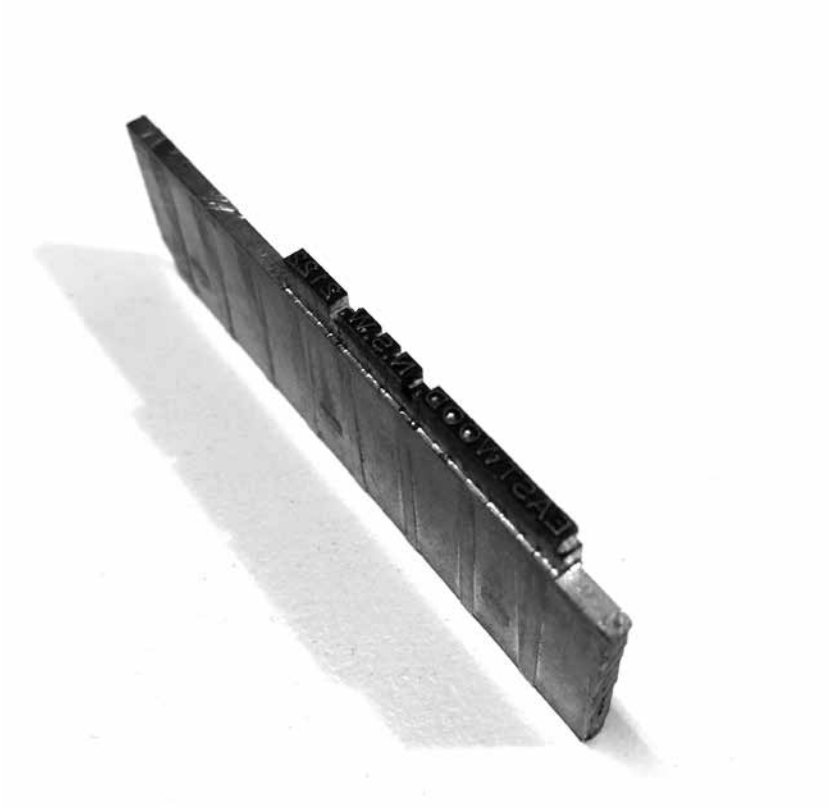

Fig. 69 **Linotype slug**, artefact courtesy of Ray Utick, photograph by the author.

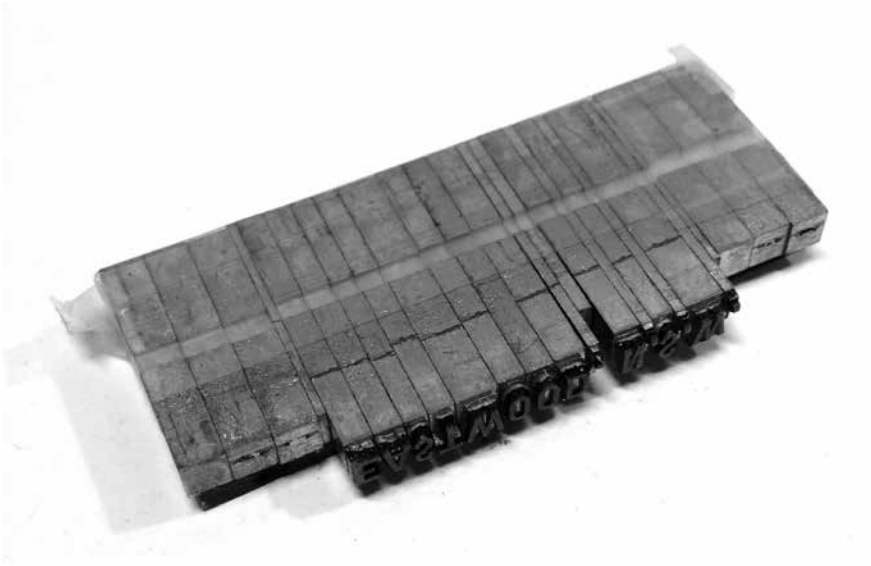

Fig. 70 **Individual Monotype pieces assembled together,** artefact courtesy of Ray Utick, photograph by the author.

Mergenthaler's Linotype [Fig. 68] is a large mechanical typesetting machine used by an individual operator. It has an angled keyboard with more than 90 keys, a hot-metal melting pot and a casting mechanism. When the operator types a letter key, a brass mould (known as a matrix) is released from the top of the machine. These matrixes drop down, one by one, assembling into a line of text. Once the line is full, the operator shifts the matrixes to a casting unit in the machine and molten metal is squirted into the mould.[21] The cooled metal is then spat out from the machine; it forms a line of type known as a *slug*.[22] [Fig. 69] Another compositor assembles these slugs by hand. Other mechanical typesetting equipment (such as the Monotype, Intertype and Ludlow machines)[23] soon followed, but the Linotype remained the most popular typesetting machinery well into the twentieth century, especially in fast-paced newspaper production. The Linotype sped up production and enabled employers to extract more surplus value from fewer skilled tradesmen.

These new hot-metal composing machines represented the partial mechanisation of the compositor's hand craft, reason enough for late-nineteenth century compositors to fear for their job security. Cockburn explains: 'Linotype threw the compositors headlong into their first ever real crisis of craft control.'[24] John Shields has explained how the arrival of the Linotype in Australia 'temporarily undermined the Typographical Association control', and 'renewed fears of an influx of female and un-apprenticed boy labour into the trade'.[25]

Traditionally, compositors have maintained a very effective resistance to attempts by employers

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[21] The molten metal is a composite of lead, tin and antimony.

[22] T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 2; A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 106.

[23] A Ludlow machine operates in a similar manner to a Linotype, however it is used for irregular characters and larger fonts, for headings and other more unusual printing requirements. The other popular mechanical typesetting system, Monotype, also sped up the production of type, but Monotype machines operated on a slightly different principle. Like the Linotype, the Monotype machine had a keyboard, although the Monotype's keyboard lay was a basic qwerty, not the Linotype keyboard layout. As the Monotype operator sat and typed the copy, the Monotype machine punched holes into a roll of paper tape, rather like a pianola roll. Once complete, the punched paper tape was fed into a separate hot-metal casting machine, known as a Monotype caster. The Monotype caster machine did not produce slugs of type; instead it produced individual characters, little letters. [Fig. 70] This method of hot-metal production was often preferable for 'tabular matter', that is, copy containing numbers, lists, forms, rather than straight runs of text. Monotype lettering has the advantage of being less brittle than Linotype and easier to insert corrections. It was ideal for work at the Gov, because government printing involved a great many forms and tabular matter.

[24] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 28.

[25] J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 21.

Fig. 71 **Detail of a Linotype machine keyboard (and posing operator), 1960.** Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 15624.

to control printers' technology.[26] In Australia and Britain, compositors' unions retained reasonably tight control over the new mechanical typesetting technology and demanded that Linotype and Monotype machinery be available only to (male) printers who were already indentured as compositors in printing craft unions.[27] Shields notes that the Australian Typographical Association was more successful at controlling the technology in urban areas than in rural and regional printing houses.[28] In urban situations, where the unions were able to control who manned the new technology, existing indentured hand-compositors were retrained to use Linotype, Monotype and Ludlow machinery, thus maintaining the compositors' industrial control over labour process.

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[26] C. Cockburn (1999 [1981]), 'The material of male power', in D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman (eds), *The social shaping of technology*, 2nd edn, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, p. 177.

[27] Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 34. See also J. Hagan (1966), *Printers and politics: A history of Australian printing unions 1850–1950*, Australian National University Press, Canberra; R. Frances, *The politics of work*, for detailed analysis of the nineteenth and early twentieth century history of Australian printing unions.

[28] R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', pp. 21–22.

Shields says of the unionised hand-compositors who retrained to use Linotype machines:

> Assuming the mantle of skilled specialists, they quickly emerged as the new elite of the trade, effectively exploiting the productivity windfall accruing to employers to extract high piece-rate earnings … Accordingly, craftsmen had little difficulty asserting exclusive control over the new technology and preserving the regime of social exclusion which had applied in the old composing rooms. In essence, machine composing served to reorientate rather than fragment hand skill, leaving a substantial area of craft work intact.[29]

As we shall see in the following chapter, in the late twentieth century, the final generation of compositors were not as successful as their nineteenth century counterparts in co-opting new technologies for their *exclusive* use. With the introduction of computer typesetting in the 1970s and 1980s, some of these compositors were able to 'assume the mantle' of skilled specialists (technicians, programmers, computer operators). Their positions, however, were increasingly insecure due to the swift pace of technological change and to the deregulated nature of late-capitalist labour systems. Their precarious situation was also a result of the declining power and influence of the printing union movement, as it was squeezed by amalgamations and anti-union legislation, and compromised by new technologies that absorbed its members' skill base.[30]

The noisy, mechanical nature of Linotype technology was relatively easily absorbed into the traditional atmosphere of the late nineteenth century printing house. As Cockburn explains:

> The composing room, now housing the mechanical typesetter, continued an all-male preserve and lost none of its traditional atmosphere of traditional masculine camaraderie. Indeed … to many of the men, the clatter and the clunk of the Linotype if anything enhanced the manly

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[29] J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 8; R. Frances, *The politics of work*, pp. 60–61. Frances has observed that during the introduction of Linotype machinery, although some compositors were retrained, there were job lay-offs and newspapers reduced their number of highly paid tradesman, sometimes by up to two thirds.

[30] M. Webber & S. Weller (2001), 'Producing Australia, Restructuring Australia', in *Refashioning the rag trade: Internationalising Australia's textiles, clothing and footwear industries*, UNSW Press, Sydney, pp. 27–31.

> qualities of the occupation. In turn the craft contributed something to our conceptions of masculinity.[31]

Between the 1890s and the mid-twentieth century, the compositors' labour process was relatively stable in terms of the technologies used in typesetting, and compositors' unions generally retained strong industrial control over the process.[32] While some job losses ensued, many hand-compositors were retrained, learning to type on specialised Linotype keyboards (which differed from the standard keyboards available on typewriters). A Linotype keyboard had a letter system known as 'e-t-a-o-i-n / s-h-r-d-l-u' [Fig. 71], rather than the standard 'q-w-e-r-t-y' lay (qwerty later became dominant in typewriters, electronic word-processors and computers)[33] and these were the first two vertical columns on the left hand side of a Linotype keyboard. There were significant issues surrounding keyboard layout and these will be explored further on.

Cockburn has noted how printers 'chose union practices which included the carving out of a uniquely defensible identity that was skilled, white and male'.[34] The printing industry retained craft control through maintaining lengthy, gruelling apprenticeships, which could take up to eight years. This, in theory, kept the number of fully indentured journeymen printers low, keeping the demand for them high and appearing to justify their demands for high wages.[35] While the industrial strength of printers appeared strong and craft oriented, the arrival of computer technologies in the 1970s and 1980s enabled compositors to be not merely deskilled but wholly undermined, eventually becoming entirely redundant in the printing process.[36]

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31 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 31.

32 C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power', p. 185.

33 M. Shmith, op. cit.

34 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 32.

35 R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 38.

36 A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 124.

The end of hot-metal

The introduction of computerised photocomposition – also known as 'cold composition' or 'cold type' – completely disrupted the compositors' traditional craft culture and labour process. As Australian sociologist Rosslyn Reed states, it represents a 'decisive discontinuity in the social relations of print'.[37] To date there have been several 'generations' of electronic and computer typesetting.[38] The first generation of electronic typesetting (known as teletypesetting or TTS) was developed in the mid-1950s and introduced in the 1960s into the composing rooms in the United States, including such premises as the *New York Times*.[39] TTS partnered with the old hot-metal system by producing slugs of type using an automatic typecasting machine. This machine was fed with 'ticker-tape', which was generated by non-union TTS operators on teleprinter machines.[40] The second generation of electronic typesetting involved *photo*typesetting, and emerged in the 1970s. This involved a process whereby text was produced on perforated or magnetic tape and inserted into a photocomposition machine. This system produced 'bromides' on photographic paper and involved a cut-and-paste method for photo-polymer platemaking.[41] This method paired with offset-lithographic printing. In the early 1980s, the third generation of electronic typesetting was more computerised, using keyboards and VDTs (video-display terminals), allowing text to be edited and formatted on screen through the entry of computer commands.[42] Later generations are harder to divide (and based more on differences in software), but ultimately the shift was towards desktop publishing programs and computer-direct-to-press printing.

The rollout of new typesetting technologies was not uniform across all developed capitalist nations and countries with weaker union movements tended to introduce the new technology more swiftly. By 1974, almost all major daily newspapers in the United States had moved to

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37 R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 37.

38 A. Zimbalist, op. cit., pp. 108–10.

39 T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 2; A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 107.

40 V. Noone (2006), 'Proofreaders at the Age', *Recorder*, August, no. 251, p. 2; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 61.

41 R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 38.

42 A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 109.

some form of electronic typesetting;[43] and the transition happened somewhat later in Europe and later still in Britain and Australia.[44] As Cockburn remarks, the British approach to printing technology was to maintain older machinery for long periods:

> Far from embarking on the electronic revolution, the British printing industry in the 1950s was still only part way through the *mechanical* revolution, which began in the nineteenth century.[45]

In this respect, Australia is similar to the United Kingdom. Strong trade unionism – combined with the high expense of importing new computer technologies from the United States, Japan or Europe – meant that Australia was sluggish in its uptake of computer typesetting.

In Australia the printers' organisations were steeped in tradition and separate delegates represented all sections of the printing process.[46] As mentioned in the previous chapter, each PKIU chapel had a Father of the Chapel (FoC), who was free to do union work at any time, which meant that the FoC effectively worked full-time for the PKIU.[47] At the Gov, the day-shift FoC during the 1970s and 1980s was a man named Peter Soley, remembered by many oral history participants as being militant and quick to call a strike. Bob Law spoke of him and quipped:

> He wasn't even a tradesman. But he had the gift of the gab, and he could get up there on that stage and he'd call a massive meeting, or a strike or whatever, a stop-work, and he could almost convince you to go out and shoot your mother.[48]

Prior to the availability of desktop publishing and affordable office printing technologies (which began in the late 1980s and early 1990s), the print unions in places such as the United Kingdom and Australia maintained control over typesetting through a process known as 'capturing

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[43] T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. xv.

[44] E.C. Bennett, *New technology*; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 65.

[45] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 65.

[46] R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 40.

[47] T. O'Lincoln (1993), *Years of rage: Social conflicts in the Fraser era*, Bookmarks Australia, Melbourne, p. 70.

[48] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

the first keystroke'.[49] Although typists (such as stenographers and secretaries) could produce typed material, this copy always had to be re-keyed by compositors, if it was to go through a large-run printing process, such as letterpress or offset-lithography. It was this control over the first keystroke that the printing unions wanted to retain, particularly as developments in computerised typesetting and offset-lithography loomed large on the horizon.[50] The danger for print unions such as the PKIU was that non-printing enterprises would utilise newer technologies (such as word processors and photocopiers) to produce printed documents and thus bypass the compositors entirely.[51]

In Australia the first company to attempt to introduce electronic phototypesetting was John Fairfax and Sons, in December 1975.[52] The technology did not require compositors because journalists or classifieds typists could input copy directly on a VDT. From there, the text would go directly to a Digiset phototypesetting machine, ready for print, thereby crumbling the traditional typesetting process. In 1976 the PKIU launched a series of claims and undertook an eight-week strike (in which the Gov's employees participated). The Fairfax PKIU members' claims included a $20 per week pay-rise and a guarantee of no job losses as a result of the new technology.[53] The Combined Unions Committee (CUC), of which the PKIU was a part, had raised funds to pay the striking workers $65 a week as partial recompense for their weeks without pay.[54] According to oral history interview participants in this project, the Government Printing Office employees who had taken part in the strike, in solidarity with the Fairfax printers, were not compensated for their weeks without pay, while the Fairfax

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[49] R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 34; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 81. For an Australian assessment of the PKIU response to technological change in the printing industry, see V. Noone (2007), 'Printers and technology around 1980: An *Age* proof reader's view', in J. Kimber & P. Love (eds), *The time of their lives: The eight hour day and working life*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Melbourne, pp. 169–80.

[50] E.C. Bennett, *New technology*, pp. 12, 34–37.

[51] ibid., p. 7.

[52] Fairfax introduced the Dutch phototypesetting system Arsycom, at a cost of $5 million. Reed notes that in many cases in Australia, new print technologies were introduced with 'a minimal degree of disruption' and that print workers have ensured that large-scale retrenchments are avoided. See R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type', p. 34.

[53] J.W. Shaw (1989), 'Mr Murdoch's industrial relations', *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 2, p. 301.

[54] T. O'Lincoln, op. cit.

members received compensation.[55] Former compositor Tim Guy grumbled:

> There'd be union meetings every couple of days. 'Stop work!' OK. 'Everyone upstairs into the canteen, and we'll have a union meeting about this and that.' … It was a bit heavy. But the unions were always heavy in the printing industry in those days. Until a stage where, I think we went out on strike, I think we were out on strike for two weeks, and the union supported Fairfax or someone, we supported *them*, and *they* got full pay, and we got I think $13 for two weeks. So they got full pay, and we got virtually nothing at the end of it. End of unions.[56]

This feeling of being hard-done by in comparison to Fairfax workers is one of the reasons why the Gov's employees often express disappointment, mistrust and sometimes anger at the PKIU. By the mid-1980s, strong anti-union feelings were prevalent at the Gov amongst some groups and individuals.

The Fairfax-PKIU dispute led to arbitration before the Industrial Commission of NSW, and to a decision by Justice John Cahill in August 1977.[57] Justice Cahill determined that the printers did not have absolute control over the entering of the first keystroke, as this was an unnecessary and inefficient handling of data. In effect, journalists and non-union staff were allowed to continue inputting text for printing and compositors only had control over the typesetting if a document arrived in hard-copy or non-transmittable form.[58] This decision meant that copy could be keyed in by advertising salespeople and journalists could input copy in editorial; it did not have to be re-keyboarded by compositors in the production area.[59] This decision led to a reduction of printing staff at Fairfax over a three-year period.[60] In a broader sense, the Cahill decision

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[55] I have not been able to verify this claim, however it seems likely that the Combined Unions Committee did not see it as their role to recompense all striking members, since it was the Fairfax metal workers who had raised funds by visiting factories. See ibid.

[56] Tim Guy, interview with author, 24 July 2013.

[57] J. Cahill (1977) *John Fairfax & Sons Limited Demarcation AR* (NSW) (arbitration decision). See also J.W. Shaw, 'Mr Murdoch's industrial relations', pp. 300–01; E.C. Bennett, *New technology*, p. 13.

[58] J.W. Shaw, op. cit., p. 301.

[59] R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay', p. 29.

[60] E.C. Bennett, *New technology*, p. 13.

represents the decline of the trade of composition in Australia as the compositors' usefulness was gradually chipped away by the introduction of computer technologies and non-union labour. The PKIU's compositors thus lost their control over the first keystroke, symbolising the increasingly superfluous status of their trade. The Gov's compositors were well aware of the Fairfax events, which were only a stroll away, down the road in Ultimo.

By the mid-1980s, electronic typesetting systems were growing in sophistication, pairing with computer operating systems and early desktop publishing software. Publishing companies were keen to improve their profits by reducing labour costs and increasing production, which they hoped to achieve by introducing high-speed equipment such as offset-lithography and computer typesetting. For big corporate publishers, this change in the labour process involved shedding their highly-paid, skilled craft workers in favour of a smaller number of non-indentured workers (often women), on lower pay.[61] Medium-sized printing companies soon followed the newspaper corporations and a number of manual trades in the printing industry were soon rendered obsolete, the stereotypers being among the first to go. Letterpress and hot-metal typesetting equipment and machines were sold as scrap metal, offered to countries with developing economies or donated to museums to be replaced by offset-lithographic presses, photo-polymer plate-making technologies and computerised typesetting equipment.

Realising that a complete resistance to new technologies was an unworkable strategy, printing unions such as the PKIU eventually negotiated to have their compositors retrained in computerised phototypesetting, rather than retrenched.[62] This strategy did not always work, as we have seen with the Fairfax dispute, where a large number of compositors were retrenched and, over a three-year period, the trade lost control over the first keystroke. It was an effective strategy at the Gov, however, because government positions had traditionally offered employees more security.[63]

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[61] R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', p. 19.

[62] E.C. Bennett, *New technology*, pp. 9–10.

[63] L. Colley (2005), 'How secure was that public service job? Redundancy in the Queensland Public Service', *Labour History*, vol. 89, November, p. 141–42. Colley notes that the notion of secure public servant tenure was intended to produce a politically neutral administrative class that could not simply be sacked by the next incoming government.

In the 1980s the Gov did not formally retrench any compositors due to technological change (although when older compositors retired, they were not replaced). Accordingly, a large number of Linotype operators and hand compositors were retrained in computer phototypesetting systems, with many having to learn to type on a qwerty keyboard. The following section outlines the existing sociological and labour history research that has examined this transitional stage that compositors underwent; the move from hot-metal typesetting to cold composition.

Existing studies of hot-metal to cold composition

> All of them today are employed in light, modern offices, where the loudest noise is the background hum of air conditioning. They see no ink, handle no lead, lift no heavy weights. Their materials are paper and film. And into their labour process the terrain of control contested by management and the trade union, has entered a new organising principle, the computer.[64]

The shift to computerised phototypesetting has been the subject of study by a number of sociologists and labour historians in the 1980s and 1990s.[65] Notable among these is Cockburn's aforementioned *Brothers*, which analyses the transition to cold composition in both Marxist and feminist terms. Cockburn's text remains the most strident, thorough and critical commentary on the arrival of cold composition into the printing industry. Her analysis is effective partly because it combines multiple disciplines – sociology, labour history and feminist criticism – and because she is able to consider both gender *and* class in her analysis. Furthermore, Cockburn takes time to articulate the specific and embodied labour processes that compositors traditionally

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[64] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 12.

[65] ibid.; C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power'; C. Cockburn, *Machinery of dominance*; R. Reed (1987), 'Making newspapers pay: Employment of women's skills in newspaper production', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 25–40; R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type'; R. Reed (1999), 'Journalism and technology practice since the Second World War', in A. Curthoys & J. Schultz (eds), *Journalism: Print, politics and popular culture*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, pp. 218–28; T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit,; M. Schulman (1988), 'Gender and typographic culture: Beginning to unravel the 500 year mystery', in C. Kramarae (ed.), *Technology and women's voices*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., New York & London, pp. 98–113; M. Wallace & A. Kalleberg, op. cit.; A. Zimbalist, op. cit; R. Hill (1984), 'From hot metal to cold type: New technology in the newspaper industry', *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 9, pp. 161–75.

undertook. While I do not want to express a wholesale endorsement of Cockburn's text (there are important aspects of skill in so called 'women's work' that she leaves out),[66] *Brothers* remains powerfully evocative of the pain caused by technological change and management decisions, and her language is infused with the rich materiality so suitable to discussions about printing. It is for these reasons that Cockburn is a strong presence in this dissertation.

In 1983 Cockburn demonstrated not only that technological change must be understood in terms of class and the relations of production but that gender, too, is a major consideration.[67] She saw technology not as static within evolving class and gender relations, but as relational and contingent. Cockburn found that the introduction of electronic typesetting was not simply a story of 'deskilling' traditional craftsmen, it was also a major challenge to hegemonic masculinity, irrevocably disrupting the gender relations of the printing industry. Perhaps unwittingly, Cockburn also considers material objects (machinery, lead, keyboards) as significant influencers in this process. It is not merely the jobs that come to be gendered, it is the 'things', too.

Cockburn, along with labour historians Raelene Frances and James Hagan (among others), explored how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the unionised craftsmen of the printing industry traditionally resisted allowing women to be trained to use their tools and technologies.[68] This was part of an effort to keep the men's wages high (women would have been paid less for the same work) and to reinforce the notion that their work was 'skilled'.[69] Printing union strategy had been to maintain control over new technologies by restricting access to them (so that they were only available to unionised craftsmen). This strategy faltered in the 1970s and 1980s, when newer technologies produced a labour process that was seen to resemble activities traditionally understood as 'women's work'.[70]

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[66] Reed notes that notions of skill are frequently 'biased in favour of male skill' and skills that are traditionally associated with women's work – e.g. typing, or social telephone skills – are designated as 'natural' and therefore not really skilled. While Reed does not overtly critique Cockburn, she expresses concern that a focus on the 'deskilling of male compositors – who were retrained on computer keyboards – merely reaffirms traditional notions about 'women's work' as being supposedly unskilled. See R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay', pp. 27–28.

[67] See also C. Cockburn, 'The circuit of technology'; C. Cockburn (1985), *Machinery of dominance: Women, men and technical know-how*, Pluto Press, London, Sydney, Dover.

[68] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, pp. 169–79; J. Hagan (1973), 'Craft power', *Labour History*, no. 24, pp. 159–75.

[69] See Chapter Seven for background analysis of women's employment position in printing industry history.

[70] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 103–04.

The operation of a Linotype machine itself was regarded as a masculine activity; it involved the casting of dangerous molten metal, it required mechanical knowledge and some degree of physical strength to push the keys down effectively.[71] For compositors in the 1970s and 1980s, moving from a Linotype keyboard to a standard qwerty keyboard was a source of much frustration. Aside from the debilitating problem of having to learn a new keyboard layout and the perceived loss of a manual skill, the introduction of computerised typesetting had gender-identity implications. For the Fleet Street compositors described by Cockburn, the transition to using computerised typesetting equipment was not only experienced as a process of 'deskilling' (particularly given that women's work was perceived as unskilled), it also left some compositors feeling emasculated by their little moulded plastic keyboards and their clean, bright, office workspaces.[72] With the end of hot-metal, compositors lost the very thing that defined their identities as crafts*men*: the heavy lead type and the cast-iron machinery that accompanied it.

In the 1970s, typewriter and word-processor keyboards were still associated with secretarial work and typing pools and consequently, the practice of typing and keyboarded machinery itself was often perceived as 'women's work'.[73] The act of typing swiftly and accurately on any kind of keyboard can be experienced as a very pleasurable activity. On the flipside, the process of re-learning another keyboard layout – and being taught to type by young female typing trainers – could be demoralising and emasculating for male compositors.[74]

This was also a design shift to a form of machinery that most compositors did not understand. With Linotype, the mechanics of the machine were visibly legible; its mechanisms were laid bare and exposed; the operators could see the machine functioning before them. Most machine-compositors knew the sounds and tensions of their Linotype and Monotype machines very well, and often spent time tending to their machines before use – cleaning them, tuning

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71 ibid.

72 ibid., p. 96.

73 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 96; R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay'; R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit.; P. Atkinson (2005), 'Man in a briefcase: The social construction of the laptop computer and the emergence of a type form', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 191–205.

74 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, pp. 96–97.

them, knowing their sounds, smells and textures. To machine-compositors, the Linotype was almost as well understood as a car engine might have been to an auto-mechanic.[75] Not only did compositors possess knowledge about graphic design, text layout and language, but the mechanism that produced hot metal type was a key part of their sense of skill. The exposed, open and mechanical design of the Linotype machine allowed this knowledge to form over time.

Fig. 72 **The swiftly obsolescent Autologic MTU machines, 1984**, part of the Penta typesetting system installed at the Government Printing Office. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. PXA63391, Government Printing Office 4 – 29154.

With the opacity and technical illegibility of computer typesetting equipment, that embodied technical knowledge was lost. With computer typesetting, the compositors were faced with small, mysterious monitors, clad in smooth, beige plastic cases, sealed and unknowable. Cockburn explains: 'Most of the men had had a glimpse inside the input unit. They saw an

[75] ibid., p. 48. My research into the Government Printing Office has found that it was the engineers – not the Linotype operators – who technically had the demarcation that allowed them, and only them, to fix the machines. Nonetheless, Linotype operators still had a strong knowledge of their machine's technical function.

enigma.'[76] No longer was the physical design of their typesetting machine an indicator of how the machine functioned. Cockburn goes on to say:

> It is impossible not to sympathise with the men's sense of having lost their product to the system … The new electronic keyboards however are small, smooth, encased and unrevealing … No one would dare touch the circuitry or offer an opinion if it went wrong. They sit as passively as a woman machinist in a garment factory while the male technician attends to a repair. In such ways the men have moved from an active and interactive relationship to a technology to a passive and subordinated one.[77]

The data from the plastic monitors was transmitted – via disks or cables – into a larger processing unit, which, resembling an IBM mainframe computer from the 1960s, looked out-of-date even in 1984. [Fig. 72]

Reader's assistant Phillip Morehouse, who started at the Gov in 1963, witnessed the transition to electronic typesetting from the perspective of a non-trade worker.[78] Phillip reflected on his work in the hot-metal days, running back and forth between the Linotype operators, the proof-readers and the hand-compositors, ensuring that corrections were inserted into the final copy. He described the new computer system at the Gov as a mystifying system and saw it as less efficient than the hot-metal process:

> It got worse before the end, when they changed from hot-metal to cold. They got rid of all the hot-metal and had the computer and that. And that actually made everything <sigh> <pause> 'cos if I wanted to get a proof corrected with the hot-metal, it was only a matter of whippin' next door, seeing the boss, then saying 'I'll just go down and see so-and-so', and they'd re-set the line, and you'd take the hot lead slug in your hand and take it down to the composing room. But with the computer, of

[76] ibid., p. 102.

[77] ibid., pp. 100, 102.

[78] A reader's assistant reads the original copy aloud to the proof-reader, who silently reads the typeset version at the same time. His position was still regarded as necessary, but the processes he undertook did change over time.

> course, you couldn't do all that. It was like a sausage machine, it'd be all fed in and you had to wait. So things got later.[79]

Note how Phillip specifically mentions holding the corrected lead slug *in your hand,* taking the correction back to the compositors to insert into the galley. The loss of that material connection was experienced as a palpable loss of control over the typesetting and correction process. With the solidity of hot-metal came a sense of confidence, assurance and predictability. The only thing that could go wrong was human error – the old system wouldn't mysteriously swallow up work like a 'sausage machine' without explanation.

In other studies of the shift from hot-metal to cold composition, similar stories of deskilling and a loss of material connection can be found, although these are less explicitly linked to hegemonic masculinity than Cockburn's analysis. In 1979 Zimbalist proposed a counter-argument to popular claims that new technologies made workers' lives easier and increased their job satisfaction by easing the physical burden of work. Using Braverman to shape his claim, Zimbalist prepared a strident defence of the skilled craftsman printers, presenting their experience of technological change as one of fundamental loss: deskilling, labour process degradation and increasing exploitation through tighter management control, all made possible by the computer systems.[80] Zimbalist noted that the traditional craft demarcation and isolated tactics by local craft unions resulted in a fragmented opposition to job losses and deskilling in the United States newspaper industry. He showed his own subtle gender bias by describing how 'ordinary typists' (i.e., women) replaced 'skilled men', revealing an unexamined attitude to what constitutes skill in gendered labour contexts.[81]

Writing in 1980, sociologists Therese Rogers and Natalie Friedman established that not all compositors experienced the change in the same way, noting that in the United States some compositors welcomed the transition while others, particularly the older generations, were

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[79] Phillip Morehouse, interview with author, 21 October 2011.

[80] A. Zimbalist, op. cit.

[81] ibid., p. 108.

more resistant.[82] In their quantitative study of employed (and retired) New York compositors in the International Typographical Union (and some of their wives), Rogers and Friedman focused on the three-year period after a collective bargaining agreement had been made. This agreement had ensured the compositors' job security (for a short time) and required them to be retrained in electronic typesetting and paste-up. Rogers and Friedman focus on the thorny issue of retraining: who is willing to be retrained and who would rather retire or move on to a different industry? Their findings were cautiously optimistic about newer technologies, arguing that most of the printers have 'shown the capacity to change, to learn new methods and to accept the loss of their craft'.[83] The authors warn, however, that these men were 'not sufficiently prepared for the transition away from printing'.[84]

In 1982, sociologists Michael Wallace and Arne Kalleberg bemoaned the loss of the compositor's traditional skills in the United States between the 1930s and the late 1970s and, like Zimbalist, were keen to dispute the theory that 'technological innovation increases skill levels'.[85] In 1984, social scientist Roberta Hill examined the experience of different occupational groups at a New Zealand newspaper: ex-Linotype compositors who retrained to use VDTs, compositors who retrained in 'paste-up' and non-trade TTS operators.[86] Hill's approach moved away from Braverman's focus on skill and control towards what she called a 'relational' approach, focusing on the relations between employers and different groups of workers and the historically defined interests that structure their interactions.[87]

Reed has explored the hot-metal-to-cold-type transition in an Australian context, examining David Syme and Co., a newspaper publishing company in Melbourne (at the time publisher of the *Age*), that began to introduce new typesetting technologies from 1980.[88] Reed's analysis

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82 T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 8.

83 ibid.

84 ibid., p. xvii, 136.

85 M. Wallace & A. Kalleberg, op. cit., p. 307.

86 R. Hill, op. cit., p. 165.

87 ibid., p. 163.

88 R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type'; R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay'.

included considerations of the women employed in the classifieds advertising telephone room, positions that had been created after the introduction of computer typesetting. By focusing on both the (male, indentured) compositors and the new (often female, non-trade) workers, Reed's approach attempts to dissolve the patriarchal mould that had shaped discussions about printers' 'deskilling' and craft skill. This thorny definitional issue of 'skill' and 'deskilling' is outlined in the following section.

Skill and deskilling

The issue of the sexual division of labour has been a focus for feminist scholars since the 1970s, and this matter frequently boils down to the question of skill – why is it that women's labour is regarded as 'unskilled' while men's work is routinely interpreted as 'skilled'?[89] This issue is highly relevant for compositors in the printing industry in the 1970s and 1980s, as their work was supposedly 'feminised' with the introduction of computing technologies.

While Wallace, Kalleberg and Zimbalist follow Braverman,[90] tending to regard the retrained compositors as purely 'deskilled', it was not until the 1990s that academic discussions began to unpick the concept of skill. The issue of skill and implied 'deskilling' has subsequently become the subject of major debates in labour history and the social sciences. In 1995 Shields summarised the discourse well, noting that there are two distinct theoretical lines, the technicist and the social constructionist.[91] The technicist view regards skill as objective – something objectively developed through exposure to work and technology. This sense of objective skill encompasses things such as problem solving, manual dexterity, relevant knowledge, speed, precision and competence.[92] This view is closest to Braverman's approach and in Australian labour history it remains a dominant interpretation of what happened to craft workers.[93]

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89 R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', p. 17.

90 A. Zimbalist, op. cit.; M. Wallace & A. Kalleberg, op. cit.; H. Braverman, op. cit.

91 J. Sheilds, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 2; R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', p. 17.

92 J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 2.

93 ibid., pp. 3–6.

The social constructionist view interprets skill as a socially shaped concept – a label that is given to some activities and not to others. Shields explains, 'work is said to be recognised and rewarded as skilled essentially because the workers who perform it have succeeded, by means of collective action, in having it classified as skilled'.[94] This interpretation of skill informs the feminist analysis of writers such as Reed, Cockburn and Frances.[95] This interpretation is able to explain the way certain occupations, e.g., Linotype operation, remained closed to different social groups and it explains the way in which a female typist's labour process is undervalued compared to the (arguably similar) work of a compositor. Reed objected to the way in which the labour performed by female staff in the telephone classifieds area was automatically seen as 'deskilled' because it did not resemble the men's labour process in the traditional print-room.[96]

Shields breaks down the social construction position into two different strands, the 'strong' and the 'weak'.[97] The strong view asserts that 'skill' is purely socially constructed, no matter the actual content of the work itself. The weak view – which seems the most sensible of these approaches – understands 'skill' to encompass both objectively measurable aspects (manual dexterity, knowledge, competence) as well as social conventions and collective strategies that shape a worker's social status and influences whether their work is regarded as skilled. 'Far from being mutually exclusive categories,' says Shields, 'objective skill and skilled status and, more generally, technology and the social division of labour exist in a dialectical and historical relationship'.[98]

What happens to the compositors whose work process is changed to resemble supposedly unskilled 'women's work'? Printing commentator Alan Marshall had an open mind about new typesetting technologies:

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[94] ibid.

[95] R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay'; R. Reed, 'From hot metal to cold type'; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*; C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power'; R. Frances, *The politics of work*; R. Frances, 'Marginal matters'.

[96] R. Reed, 'Making newspapers pay', pp. 29–31.

[97] Here Shields cites C. Littler (1982), *The development of the labour process in capitalist societies*, Heinemann, London, p. 9; in J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', pp. 2–3.

[98] J. Shields, 'Deskilling revisited', p. 3.

> The inherent capabilities of computer typesetting do not, however, necessarily imply deskilling. These systems are in fact more flexible and capable of far greater manipulation than ever were the Linotypes or Monotypes, and can be used to integrate keyboard and typographic skill with decision making.[99]

While Marshall's view could risk an uncritical celebration of computer technologies, there is some truth to his statement. The compositors at the Gov who retrained in computer typesetting lost some skills and gained others. As individuals, these compositors have conflicting views about whether the change to the work process had a positive or negative impact on their careers. What can be said, however, is that the end of hot-metal profoundly disrupted the stability of their working lives, leaving these ex-compositors in a vulnerable position, always having to keep up with new computing technologies and never quite catching up. The following chapter examines the experience of compositors at the Gov in more detail.

[99] A. Marshall, op. cit., p. 105.

6. ‘Going with the technology’: how the final generation of hot-metal compositors survived technological change

Fig. 73 **Compositor Rod McGregor and an apprentice, c. 1976–80,** in the railway printing section at the Government Printing Office, southern end of the third floor. Courtesy of Philip James, reproduced with permission.

Introduction

> Hell is a collection of individuals who are spending the bulk of their time working on a task they don't like and are not especially good at. Say they were hired because they were excellent cabinetmakers, and then discover they are expected to spend a great deal of their time frying fish.[1]

This chapter tells the story of the compositors at the Government Printing Office who lost their traditional printing trade and experienced the introduction of computer typesetting technologies. While Chapter Four focused on the labour experience of press-machinists, this chapter looks to the workers involved in the pre-press area at the Gov: the men and women who typeset, formatted and proofread the text before printing. Most of the former compositors whom I interviewed had become apprentices in this trade in the 1960s and 1970s. When they started at the Gov, their future working lives seemed to be on a predictable and comfortable course. While their wages were somewhat lower than the private sector, the job security of the public service meant they could look forward to a slow but steady repayment of mortgage debt, as well as pension benefits. Piecework rates (for Linotype operators) and overtime (two nights and Saturdays) provided desirable top-ups to their salary that many workers grew to expect as part of the job. Many compositors imagined they would have a 'job for life', a lifelong craft that would sustain their whole families, and this was often framed in the traditional breadwinning sense.[2] Instead, many compositors experienced years of uncertainty about if and when their trade was going to disappear and what would happen to them once computers had 'overtaken' their craft.

The transition from hot-metal typesetting to computerised phototypesetting is representative of, and part of, a broader economic and political shift in Australia; the move away from a protectionist manufacturing economy into a neo-liberal service economy geared towards

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[1] D. Graeber (2013), 'The modern phenomenon of nonsense jobs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September, visited 3 September 2013, http://www.smh.com.au/national/public-service/the-modern-phenomenon-of-nonsense-jobs-20130831-2sy3j.html.

[2] J. Murphy (2005), 'Work in a time of plenty: Narratives of men's work in post-war Australia', *Labour History*, vol. 88, p. 215.

international markets. This broad shift has been well documented in the disciplines of political economy and history.[3] But what happened to the workers who were pulled along with this transition? And how important was the material and embodied nature of traditional typesetting in this loss of a trade? These are the two issues that this chapter examines. For these compositors, the introduction of computers into their labour process resulted in a profound loss of control, and the only way to regain that control did not appear, to many of the workers, to be in the collective security of unions, nor in the skills built up from a life of work in printing.[4] With what (or whom) should they forge new alliances, in order to ensure their survival?

The labour climate of the 1980s encouraged workers to take personal responsibility for their own financial security. Individual initiative was rewarded and collective organisation was increasingly reviled by business and government. The divided opinion among union leaders over whether to resist the new technologies or to aim for the retraining of their members added to the compositors' confusion.[5] While management provided retraining at the Gov, in many cases individuals were implicitly expected to train themselves, in order to 'shape up' for the coming digital century, and many at the Gov did precisely this. This research found that in the 1980s, former hot-metal compositors at the Gov used individual initiative to retrain; they no longer found security in the old collective practices, craft traditions and camaraderie that had once characterised their workplace. Those who did not retrain were left in an even more tenuous position than their computer-literate workmates, and some left the printing trade entirely.

This chapter uses the voices of some of the compositors who experienced this shift at the Gov. While Cynthia Cockburn's Fleet Street compositors (as recounted in *Brothers*) were retrained in

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[3] See for example B. Kingston (2006), *A history of New South Wales*, Cambridge University Press, New York and Melbourne; N.G. Butlin, A. Barnard & J.J. Pincus (1982), *Government and capitalism: Public and private choice in twentieth century Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney; T. O'Lincoln (1993), *Years of rage: Social conflicts in the Fraser era*, Bookmarks Australia, Melbourne; M. Webber & S. Weller (2001), 'Producing Australia, restructuring Australia', in *Refashioning the rag trade: Internationalising Australia's textiles, clothing and footwear industries*, UNSW Press, Sydney, pp. 10–38.

[4] R. Sennett (1998), *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York & London, p. 19.

[5] A. Zimbalist, op. cit., p. 124.

the 1970s,[6] the compositors at the Gov did not undergo retraining until the early to mid-1980s. The Gov's compositors had an experience that was quite different to the crisis that Cockburn describes, particularly in terms of gender, technology and social acceptance. There are historical shifts between the 1970s and the 1980s with regard to both computerisation and gender roles in the workplace, and these play into the compositors' experience of technological change.

By the 1980s, computers with qwerty keyboards were increasingly acceptable as devices for both men and women at work. At the Gov, women were invited to apply for compositing apprenticeships from 1974, signalling that the trade had taken baby-steps to dismantle hundreds of years of patriarchal dominance. The Gov's compositors had seen technological changes happen everywhere *but* their workplace, and some were impatient to catch up with the rest of the printing industry. These are the reasons why the Gov's compositors have a subtly different experience to the narrative provided by Cockburn. While *Brothers* is primarily negative about the impact of computerisation, Cockburn does not engage with what happened next for these compositors (indeed she could not, as she was writing at the moment it was happening). Here, we have the benefit of moving from a sociological perspective to an historical one. Labour historian Raelene Frances has observed that 'the historian is well placed' to examine how and why work has changed over time.[7] Through history, we are able to see these compositors' stories from a broader perspective and in the context of their whole working lives.[8]

What happened to the compositors who lost their traditional printing trade at the Gov? While some compositors retired or left the printing trade in the 1980s, the majority of them retrained and embraced computer typesetting, ultimately finding positions in fields such as computer programming, design, desktop editing, printing accounts management and book production. It is evident that these compositors lost their traditional craft and that this loss of craft culture and manual skill was bitterly missed. That said, some of these ex-compositors also speak of how they

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[6] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London.

[7] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 2.

[8] The initial intention of the oral history project was not to discover the 'whole working life story' of the participants (its focus was on participants' experiences *at the Gov*, and particularly their experiences of technological change). In that sense, the interviews are not that well suited to apply to 'whole of life' studies of the compositors. There is scope for further research in this area.

thrived in the wake of technological change, and they did so by focusing on individual self-development, albeit to the detriment of collective identities and collective practices.

The technological change experienced by the printing industry was not merely a case of processes becoming faster and more automated, nor was it merely a story of compositors losing their jobs. It was also a situation where the culture of neo-liberalism – a culture that demanded workers constantly adapt, retrain and be 'flexible' – had permeated all aspects of workers lives. This emerging social and economic regime profoundly changed these compositors' identities, as well as their attitudes to technology, skill, collectivity and to their fellow workers. Those who thrived in the new technologies did so as individuals, while those who only grudgingly retrained in new technologies often describe the hot-metal days at the Gov as the best time of their working lives.

The introduction of computer typesetting at the Gov

> We'd heard little bits and pieces. And that's when the nerves start to give. What was gonna happen? Because these rumours were increasing each day and things were being heard. <pause> 'What's gonna happen? Is it gonna affect me, affect you, affect both of us?' We did know what the impact it was going to be on any of us … Then they just come in one day and said, 'Right, we're gonna change over, we're gonna retrain youse.' [9]

Understanding the story of technological change at the Government Printing Office necessitates an historical awareness of how the Gov emerged as a service department, rather than a for-profit enterprise, that was intended for the production of official, authoritative documentation, not for the profit-driven swift production of printed matter. The material being printed at the Gov was chiefly black-and-white and text-heavy in nature and for a long time hot-metal typesetting and letterpress sufficed. Former manager Alan Leishman remarked (admittedly over-exaggerating

[9] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

the letterpress emphasis at the Gov):

> We still were basically a letterpress printing organisation when it closed, and still principally a hand-binding place. And it was being driven by the government departments, rather than as a commercial enterprise. So we were being driven by such places as the Parliament of New South Wales who demanded all these processes that as it turned out weren't really necessary.[10]

The detailed and traditional nature of Parliamentary documents also meant that many new computer word-processing systems were inadequate, as older technologies could be more easily modified manually to allow the complex endnotes, annotations and paragraph numbering that appear in legislation and Parliamentary papers.

As noted previously, jobs at the Gov did not pay particularly well compared to outside industry, but the Gov retained staff because a government position provided lifelong job security and superannuation; for that reason many employees considered themselves 'lifers' and planned accordingly.[11] Yet, as other printing establishments in Australia introduced newer printing technologies manufactured in Germany and the United States – such as high-speed offset lithography and phototypesetting systems – little was done to change technologies at the Gov, or to train and develop staff skills in the 1960s and early 1970s. It could be said that from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, the Gov remained stagnant, as if fixed in time. By the mid-1970s compositors at the Gov were well aware of the impending obsolescence of hot-metal typesetting in the printing industry as a whole.[12] On 30 June 1976, the PKIU held a meeting during which it screened a film produced by the International Typographical Union of America, *The New World of ITU*. In his introduction, the Federal Secretary of the PKIU, E.T. Bennett, said the

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[10] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[11] Don West (1983) 'Review of Government Printing Office', pp. 1–2. NSW Government Printing Office internal document. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2105, NSW State Records.

[12] 'Technological change in industry' (1976), *Staff News*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, September, p. 11.

arrival of the new technologies was 'inevitable' and emphasised the importance of keeping the first keystroke in the hands of the compositors.[13]

Fig. 74 **Monotype Room at the Government Printing Office, Level 4, 1965**. Overseer Ernie Myson inspects an operator's work. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 27296.

Compositors were unsure about whether to stay at the Gov, given how slow their workplace was to take on new technologies. However, many knew that they did not have the computer skills that would be needed if they moved elsewhere, which left them feeling stuck at the Gov. Government Printer Don West reflected on this problem in 1983:

> Employees … quickly became aware of the increasing gap between their wages and the private sector, and the ever-widening gap between the offset technology rapidly developing in the private sector and the obsolete letterpress technology retained at the Printing Office. It appears that

[13] ibid., p. 11.

> employees were badly trained, badly equipped and badly supervised …
> By the early 1970s the Office was seething with discontent and was best described as a time-bomb.[14]

When I interviewed him in 2012, Don elaborated on why this was the case, laying most of the blame on the previous Government Printer, VCN Blight:

> It was a rather a unique situation. The previous Government Printer had been employed in the place since he was 15 and worked his way through the system and they were still using the sort of equipment in the place that they had when he was 15, and he couldn't see anything different. He had all sorts of excuses why they didn't do anything different, that's why the fact was, they just didn't keep up with what was taking place. They paid no attention to technology of the day and they had a strange system where they used to pay the staff peanuts, and then try and reward them by granting them unlimited overtime. It was a silly system, it didn't work. People used to work almost 24 hours around the clock to earn a decent living.[15]

Don, no doubt, was keen to justify his own management of the Gov, and he describes the two decades before his tenure at the Gov as the 'lost years'.[16] Nonetheless, he identifies a problem that is worth examining: staff morale was reaching new depths, and fears about the private sector were increasing. Don was aware that the Gov's clients – government departments – were increasingly attempting to get their own employees to do their own typesetting, on computerised word processors, in-house. That is, government departments were trying to gain control over the casting of the first keystroke.

> At present, any government department which has an electronic typewriter or word processing machine considers that it has a typesetting ability, and

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[14] D. West, 'Review of Government Printing Office', p. 2.

[15] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

[16] D. West, 'Review of Government Printing Office'. It is curious to note Richard Peck's description of the Government Printing Office 1920–1989: 'the lost years'. The connection is purely coincidental. See R.C. Peck, op. cit., p. 43.

> huge quantities of information that would normally be typeset using the typographical skills of a craftsman … are now being produced using some form of duplicating processing … What is, in effect, happening is that the authors of government information and their typists are tending to replace the printing tradesmen.[17]

Don saw that situation could potentially render the Government Printing Office, as a whole institution, obsolete, and he was keen to avert this course for as long as possible.

Fig. 75 **Stuart Lincolne, Minister for Services Eric Bedford, and Government Printer Don West open the new computer area at the Government Printing Office, 1985**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 40604. Note: the date is incorrect in the SLNSW catalogue entry.

By the early 1980s, knowing that computer phototypesetting had already been introduced at government printing offices in Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Canberra, Don pushed hard for the funds to introduce computer typesetting at the Gov.[18] Finally, new

[17] D. West, 'Review of Government Printing Office', p. 3.

[18] The Commonwealth Government Printing Office introduced VDTs in 1977. G.T. Dick, op. cit., p. 27.

typesetting technologies were introduced incrementally between 1981 and 1989, in two major strands: the Comp-Edit machines were introduced in 1981, and a full-scale typesetting system was installed in 1984–85, using software from Penta Systems International, Baltimore and hardware from Data General.[19] The cost of the Penta system was more than $3.5 million.[20] To assist with this transition, Don appointed a number of new senior managers – technical experts in computer systems – including the Tasmanian Stuart Lincolne [Fig. 75] and the American computing entrepreneur, Len Boughal.[21] [Fig. 76]

> Don: We eventually set a path that we should follow to take ourselves into the twentieth century. We couldn't do it without people. The first thing we had to do was get the right sort of people for the task. We set about finding those people, and we were quite fortunate – there was a young Tasmanian guy, Dr Stuart Lincolne, who had been involved in the development of cold-laser technology in ICL in the UK. We were lucky to get him, and he became a key figure in our development. Through him, and our contacts in the States, we were able to bring in another IT guy, I can't think of his surname, it was Len somebody …
>
> *Jesse: Len Boughal?*
>
> Don: Len Boughal, yeah, Len Boughal. And Len was a protégé of Data Logics, who were developing the phototypesetters, and typesetting programs that were specifically designed for mass publications. So, Len was unattached, and he wanted to come to Australia for a while so we were able to get him a work permit.[22]

Note how Don speaks of bringing the Gov into the 'twentieth century' – in the 1970s! His disdain for hot-metal is clear. For him, these older technologies were inefficient remnants of nineteenth century craft. The 'new men' who Don hired were of a different breed to the

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[19] Legislative Assembly Question on Notice #724, question from Gary McIlwaine, Member for Ryde, 8 November 1984. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2101, NSW State Records.

[20] H. Whiting (1984) 'Implementation of Computer Typesetting', 16 May, internal document, NSW Government Printing Office. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2100, NSW State Records.

[21] Sometimes recorded in State Library of NSW image catalogue records as 'Len Bogle'.

[22] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

managers that the Gov's employees had come to expect. They had not been apprenticed in the printing industry, and their presence disrupted the established social structures at the Gov in terms of class and perceptions of what constituted technical skill. These new managers felt little attachment to the old crafts of the composing room and tended to argue that hot-metal typesetting was dangerous, inefficient and expensive to maintain. On these counts, nobody could effectively disagree.

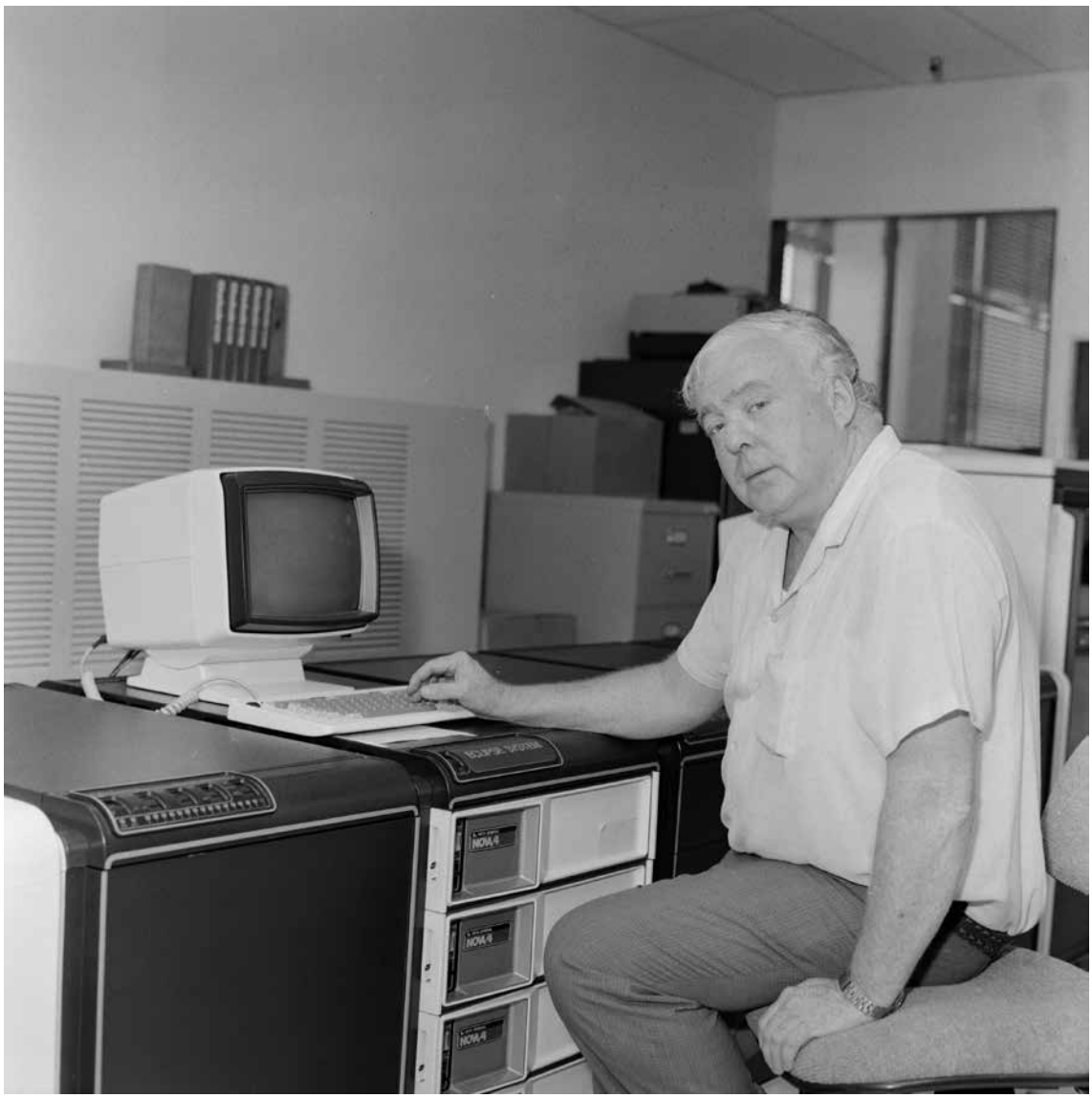

Fig. 76 **Computer typesetting manager Len Boughal, 1985.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 30142.

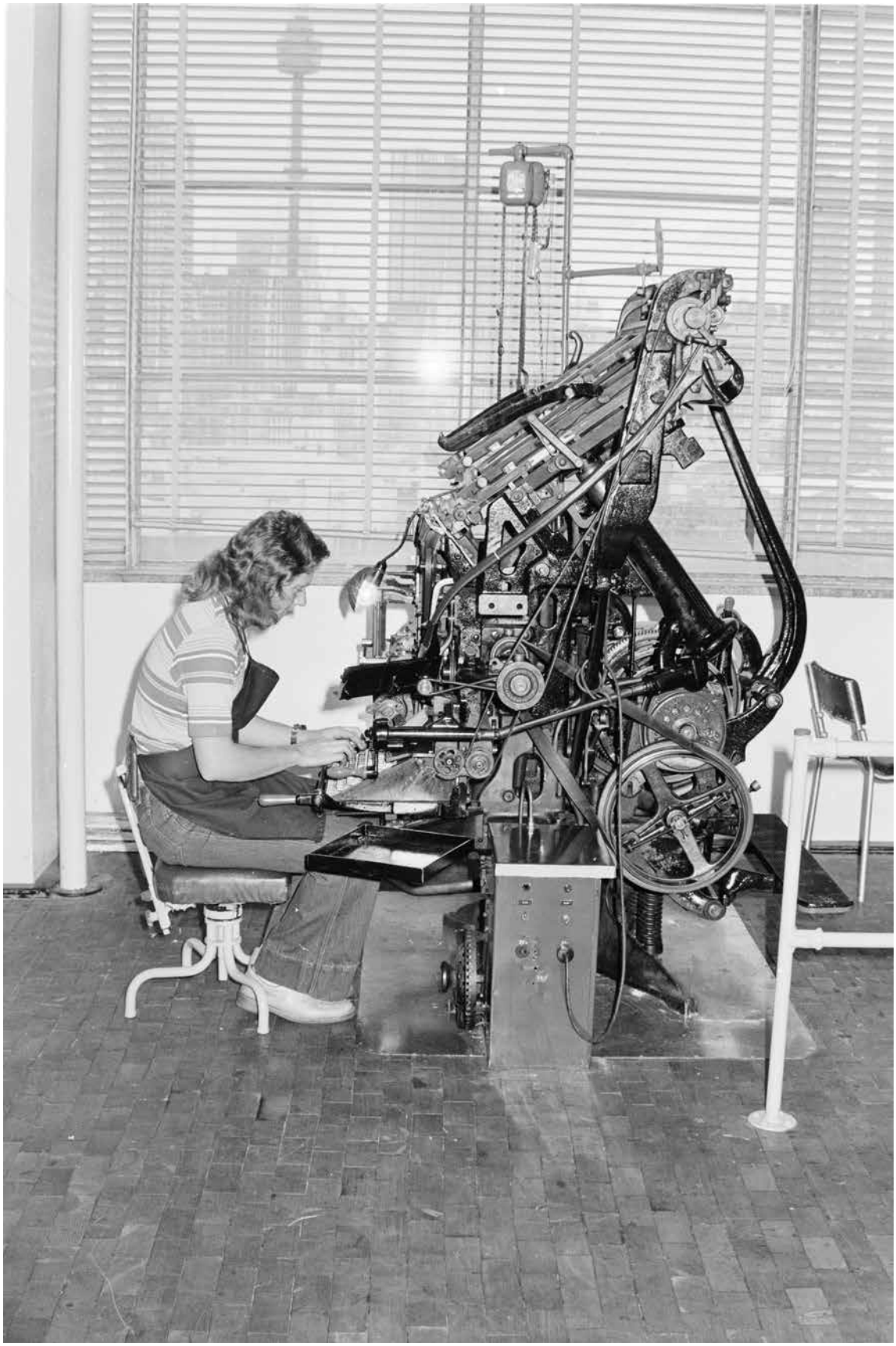

Fig. 77 **Third-year apprentice compositor Gary Wilson (aka Andre the Giant) in training to use a Linotype machine, 1978**, in the apprentice training room, with Centrepoint Tower visible in the background. For apprentices to be training on the Linotype machine in 1978 is indicative of the Gov's slow uptake of new typesetting technologies. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 46915.

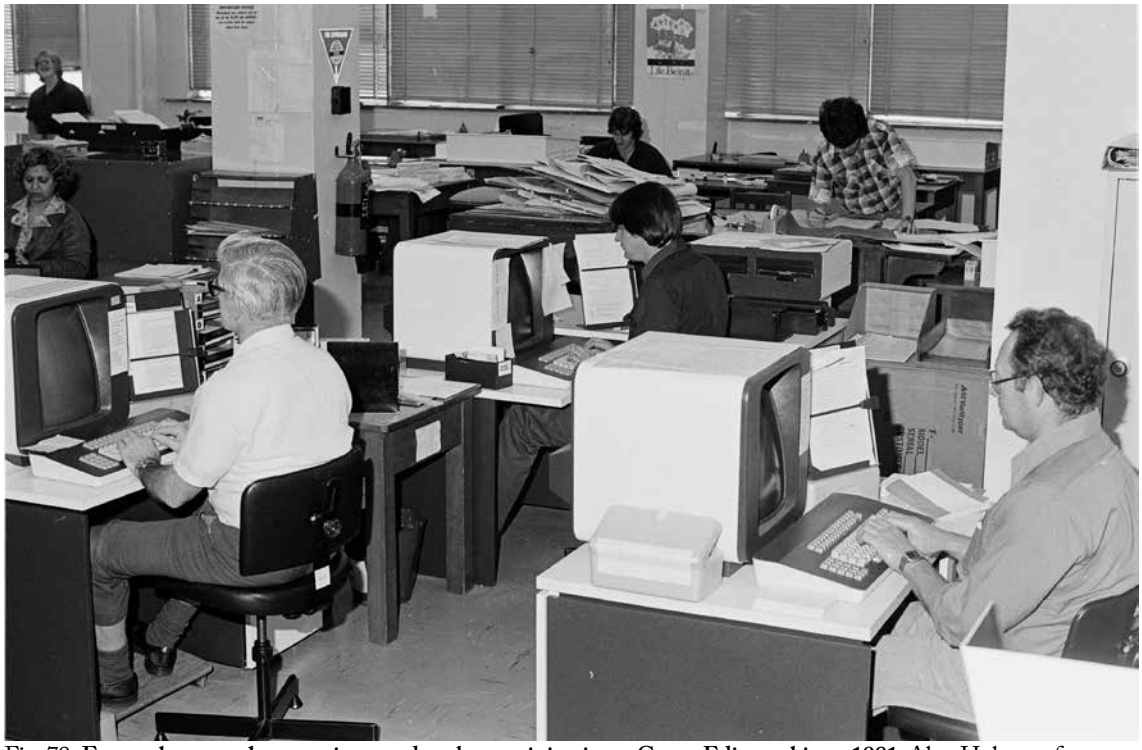

Fig. 78 **Former hot-metal compositors undertake retraining in on Comp Edit machines, 1981**. Alan Holten, a former Linotype operator, is on the far right. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 17524.

As noted in Chapter Two, Monotype Room at the Gov was closed down in April 1984.[23] Linotype was phased-out more slowly, although it continued to be used as a backup option right up to 1989.[24] Negotiations between the NSW Public Service Board, the PKIU and the Printing Office drew to a close in late 1985. This agreement changed compositors' job classifications to acknowledge their new status as 'keyboard operators' and 'computer operators' and it ensured that no compositors were sacked. However, the agreement also allowed non-union workers to operate computer-typesetting equipment in some circumstances, a concession that the PKIU had been reluctant to make.[25] Linotype pieceworkers and Monotype operators were the first tradespersons to be offered retraining in computer typesetting. From 1981, nine Linotype pieceworkers and eight Monotype operators were the first compositors to be given

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[23] 'M*O*N*O', special issue of *The Graphic* (1984) NSW Government Printing Office staff journal, vol. 8, no. 1, April, p. 1.

[24] 'New Technology in the Government Printing Office' (1983), meeting minutes, 22 February, NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2105, NSW State Records.

[25] D. West, 'Review of Government Printing Office', pp. 1–2.

the opportunity to train on Comp-Edit computers and Microbees.[26] Bob Law, one of the first Linotype operators to be retrained, recalled:

> Well, for me, I was one of the first four people in the whole place to be trained on the new technology … They put us up for a week at the Hilton in George Street. Mind you, I don't know why they did that because we didn't live that far away. And we were trained by some people from a company called Penta, no, Data General, whose machines were called Penta. They trained us, and it was *full-on*, because it was totally alien to anything we'd ever had before and to actually sit at a machine and do stuff. And you couldn't see what you were actually doing, it was just like sitting at a computer now; you take it for granted, you punch stuff into the keyboard. It just happens. Whereas, all my working life, whatever I did, I could actually *see* the process. And I wasn't the only one that was having trouble with that.[27]

Bob was both a pieceworker and a timehand (depending on which shift he was doing). Pieceworkers were the employees who stood to lose the most financially, because the shift to computer typesetting involved the removal of that remnant of Taylorism, piecework rates. Linotype pieceworkers at the Gov (and elsewhere) had been highly motivated by financial gain, so this transition was resisted.[28] Geoff Hawes remarked with some pride that some of the pieceworkers were so fast and accurate, they earned a great deal of extra income. Here, Geoff describes the Linotype pieceworker, Bob Stringer:

> There was one guy there, he was making more money than the Government Printer! He was just unbelievable … He had it going that quick, he'd have a line hanging all the time. It didn't stop! … And then the Readers would get his galley proofs, and – nothing. There might

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[26] 'Applications for training as word processing operators' (1982), *Staff Circular*, NSW Government Printing Office, internal document, 30 July. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2092, NSW State Records.

[27] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

[28] H. Whiting, 'Implementation of Computer Typesetting'.

> be one mistake every now and then. But if they found a mistake they'd make a big 'Bobby Stringer's got a mistake!' But he was making so much money. Well, those guys lost all that. Because once they changed over to photocomposition, there was no more piecework. And some of them dropped a *lot* of money.[29]

Without piecework rates, former Linotype compositors were less motivated to work productively and, added to this, they had lost the need for their original craft skills of operating a Linotype keyboard, knowing the correct word-breaks, and knowing the precise timbre, tension and embodied specificity of their Linotype machine.

As Geoff and Bob attest, having to learn the qwerty keyboard held the Linotype operators back. Again, this is an instance where the *design* of machinery resulted in complex industrial problems. The Monotype operators, on the other hand, had less difficulty using a qwerty keyboard on a computer, because the Monotype keyboard had also used a qwerty layout. Geoff explains:

> The guys in the Mono went into the [electronic] typesetting side of it – fairly straight into it. Whereas the poor guys in the Lino had to learn the qwerty keyboard from new … But a lot of them picked it up pretty quick. The old ones that was the problem … A lot of the blokes just couldn't handle it. Didn't wanna handle it … So they just bailed. They just retired or went somewhere else.[30]

Another group of compositors who were particularly disadvantaged by the transition were Monotype casters (as opposed to the Monotype keyboard operators).[31] Generally, the Monotype casters tendered their resignations, or they were placed in new positions at the Gov, such as small-offset printers. The Monotype casters who were unwilling or unable to retrain were placed in general assistant roles in a variety of departments in the NSW Public Service.[32]

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[29] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

[30] ibid.

[31] See Chapter 2: the section on Monotype Caster Bob Day.

[32] 'Staff training – New technology' (1984), internal document, NSW Government Printing Office. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2100, NSW State Records.

For most of the 1980s at the Gov, it was necessary to operate both old and new technologies at the same time, particularly while the retraining of compositors (and managers) took place.[33] For example, when some workers were sent off for retraining, others would be cycled back onto Linotype machines. Some older machines were kept, covered in drop-sheets, just in case they might be needed for particularly specialised jobs. From June 1981, a section of the old General Composing Room was set aside for a retraining area, with space for 12 compositors to be trained at a time.[34] Between 1982 and 1985, more than 150 compositors were given some form of retraining, usually involving a short course in computer typesetting, and their typing speed on a qwerty keyboard was routinely tested.[35] More than 500 tonnes of typesetting metal was sold as scrap.[36]

This research has uncovered a variety of responses to the change, from completely negative resistance to the new technologies to the other extreme; an enthusiastic embrace of computerisation, and disdain for the inefficiencies of the past. Geoff explained that the differing responses to technological change depended on a person's age or generation:

> But the changeover, it was scary. It's like anything new, people … you don't know … and you're flying blind. And we're talkin' about people's livelihoods, and they'd only known … they'd been there for 20, 30, 40 years, these people, doing the same thing, and it was part of their life. Then all of a sudden it was gonna stop and change … A lot of people just grabbed it and ran with it – the younger ones. The old people struggled, a lot of them just didn't want the change. The older people hated it. They just, you know, new technology – *bluurrrgggghhh!* The

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[33] 'Introduction of Computer Phototypesetting'; Legislative Assembly Question on Notice #724, question from Gary McIlwaine, Member for Ryde, 8 November 1984. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2101, NSW State Records.

[34] B. Woollett (1981), 'Training and re-classification of compositors', *Staff News*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, August, p. 7.

[35] Penta Operator Training Plan (1984), NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2100, NSW State Records.

[36] D. West, 'Review of Government Printing Office', pp. 1–2.

> young people seemed to think it was a good adventure. You know, just something new.[37]

This distinction based on age accords with Rogers' and Friedman's studies of compositors undergoing similar changes in New York in the 1970s,[38] but we must be wary of blanket distinctions between 'old' and 'young' employees, as social structures and human diversity rarely fit neatly into such simple categories.

Former compositor Bob Bartrim was a Monotype operator at the Gov, commencing in 1956 (which places him in the older generation of compositors to experience this technological transition). Bob had been an overseer in the Monotype section and, with the change to computer typesetting, he became a supervisor in the Penta system. Bob explained how he and another manager were sent off to retrain in computer typesetting:

> Frank Yeatman [Manager of the Penta System] and myself … were asked to attend a Comp Edit training course because there were two vacancies left and everybody had already been trained. We thought this was a complete waste of time because being managers we were not allowed to work this equipment, so on day one when we arrived at the course, the teacher said, 'What would you like to do?' and Frank said,
> 'We would like to go on a pub crawl.'
> She laughed and said, 'Well, off you go.' So we did.[39]

This provides an example of compositors' reluctance to engage with the new technology. More interestingly, the anecdote reminds us that industrial demarcation related to machinery was still a significant issue in the 1980s, with managers still not being allowed to touch a compositors' machinery.

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[37] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

[38] T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit.

[39] Bob Bartrim, personal communication with author, 18 November 2013.

Gender neutralising the keyboard

> The shop floor changed from make-up benches, hundreds of type drawers, slabs, proofing machines, ink pots, lead melting furnaces for the ingots … to eventually desks and computers. What was once a very male dominated trade soon became more female oriented.[40]

As we saw in Chapter Five, sociological research into technological change in the printing industry has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex gendering and *re*-gendering of technologies and work-roles that accompanied the introduction of computers into industry. Social scientists and historians have explained in differing ways how the act of typing was historically understood to be gendered; typing was women's work.[41] The qwerty typewriter keyboard itself was therefore associated with lowly-paid, monotonous, 'feminised' labour.

On a design level, this meant that anything that had a form similar to a typewriter or a word-processor held associations with unskilled work, which was problematic when deployed into an office full of former printing craftsmen.[42] Indeed, the placement of a keyboard on personal computers and laptop computers in the 1980s was sometimes perceived as a problem in the marketing of computers to middle-class businessmen.[43] As design historian Paul Atkinson has observed:

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[40] Stephen Noyes, interview with author, 20 February 2012.

[41] R. Reed, 'Journalism and technology practice', p. 219; J. Webster, 'From the word processor to the micro', pp. 111–23; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*; C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power', p. 195; J. Wajcman, 'The feminisation of work', pp. 459–74; S. Liff, 'Information technology and occupational restructuring', pp. 95–110; E.N. Glenn & R.L. Feldberg, 'Proletarianising clerical work', pp. 51–72; D. Butler, 'Secretarial skills and office technology', pp. 20–32; E. Lupton (1993), *Mechanical brides: Women and machines from home to office*, Cooper-Hewitt, National Museum of Design Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

[42] P. Atkinson (2010), *Computer*, Reaktion Books, New York, pp. 143–44; P. Atkinson (2007), 'The best laid plans of mice and men: The computer mouse in the history of computing', *Design Issues*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 59–61.

[43] P. Atkinson, 'The best laid plans', pp. 59–61; P. Atkinson (2005), 'Man in a briefcase: The social construction of the laptop computer and the emergence of a type form', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 191–205; J.A. Stein (2011), 'In memoriam: Domesticity, gender and the 1977 Apple II personal computer', *Design and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 206.

> Despite its massive capability and the huge changes that computing technology brought to bear on office practice, the office computer had … maintained a physical form which presented itself as little more than an advanced electronic typewriter. Regardless of what it could be used to achieve, the only way of operating it remained the then feminised act of typing.[44]

Meanwhile, operating a Linotype keyboard carried associations of masculinity, skill and the 'expert craftsman'.[45] Convincing compositors in the 1970s to give up their machinery and embrace computerisation clearly invoked gender concerns; however by the 1980s some of these concerns had dissipated. Why in the 1980s was the computer not so frighteningly emasculating?

Atkinson has argued that the increasing prevalence of the computer *mouse* – in desktop computers from 1984 onwards – was a significant factor in the gender neutralising of office computers.

> Using the mouse there was not the same need to type. Instead, one could point, click, drag, and drop … Actions that could mask the feminised use of typewriter keys.[46]

Of course, by the mid-1980s, personal computers were increasingly prevalent in a large number of contexts: domestic, educational, industrial and business. Computer gaming was increasing in popularity and a culture of DIY garage computer tinkerers was continuing to evolve.[47] Computers were increasingly accepted within the domain of a male, technical class; these were machines for whole families to use and desktop PCs became acceptable for use by men who were 'experts'.[48] It is in this context that the Gov brought computers into the hot-metal typesetter's world.

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[44] P. Atkinson, 'The best laid plans', p. 60.

[45] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit., p. 4; J. Wajcman, 'The feminisation of work', pp. 459–74.

[46] P. Atkinson, 'The best laid plans', p. 60.

[47] P. Atkinson, *Computer*, pp. 82–84.

[48] P. Atkinson, 'The best laid plans', pp. 60–61.

Fig. 79 **Peter Musgrave (seated) demonstrates the new Penta typesetting system to the visiting Caucus Committee, 1984.** Minister for Services Eric Bedford is on the far left. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW #PXA633 /181, Government Printing Office 4 – 34775.

By the mid-1980s, most compositors were impatient to be retrained. Rather than being afraid that the new computer systems would emasculate them, their concerns became more about timing. The Gov's compositors, particularly the apprentices, feared that their training in hot-metal compositing meant that they were out of date in relation to newer technologies, and they were impatient to be exposed to and retrain in computer systems. In 1983 an unnamed group of 'concerned apprentices' at the Gov wrote in the staff journal, *The Graphic*, calling for their training to include exposure to new technologies such as electronic typesetting:

> Apprentices here, at the Government Printing Office, do not have much to do with new methods until third or fourth year, even then they don't spend much time … as there are so many of us to be educated … It is very noticeable at [Technical College] that we lack the experience and knowledge compared to students who work at commercial printeries … We are not just here to have a job for four years, but to learn something that will support us in the future.[49]

[49] Concerned apprentices (1983), 'Apprentices view to new technology', *The Graphic*, NSW Government Printing Office staff journal, vol. 7, no. 1, July, p. 1.

Fig. 80 **Third year apprentice compositors learning to hand-set type, 1978,** watched by Apprentice Supervisor Peter Stock. Neil Lewis is third from the front, Peter Stock is looking over his shoulder. Second from the front is Stephen Noyes, and at the front is Gary Wilson. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 46901.

Former compositor Stephen Noyes, who began his compositing apprenticeship at the Gov in 1978, expressed his frustration at the difference between his on-the-job training in the 'old ways' of hot-metal typesetting at the Gov and his technical education in phototypesetting at Sydney Technical College,[50] which was happening concurrently:

> Well, the first year, for me, was pretty easy because we basically learnt how it *used* to be done. Which is what we were still doing at the Government Printing Office! But most of the other students were using new technology. And they were struggling with the hot metal, where I could easily show them how to use a setting stick, or how to lock up stuff … But as I went further into the next couple of years, in second and third year was where I basically struggled with the new technology … I'd do that one day a week, then I'd go back to the Gov and use me

[50] Colloquially known as 'Tech'.

> setting stick, and back to the old ways … I struggled with the transition to photocomposing as I was the only one still using hot metal at the Gov, when all the other students [at Tech] were already using new technology that was taking over the printing world.[51]

Former compositors Neil Lewis and Barry Skewes had similar concerns. Neil commenced as an apprentice compositor in 1977 and Barry started the following year. Neil was a Monotype operator, and Barry a Grade 2 proof-reader. They were both impatient to be retrained in computer typesetting and, in a joint interview, they complained about the Gov being technologically 'behind' compared to the rest of the printing industry:

> Neil: And even towards the end of the first year of my apprenticeship they had established the Apprentice Training Room, in an area that used to hold all the photographic plates … Over the years there [the technology] did sorta change, but back in the early days of my apprenticeship – you *knew* change was coming, and what we're learning at Tech, and you thought, 'Well, it's gonna be years before they bring it into the Printing Office', so it was sorta like, behind the times.
>
> *Barry: We could probably never leave and get a job somewhere else, because we were always so far behind.*
>
> Neil: Yeah, with the introduction to photocomposition – a lot of outside industry were a lot more forward than the Printing Office used to be.[52]

When this finally happened, they both spent time learning and working on the Comp Edit and Penta systems. After the Gov closed down, Barry went on to run his own graphic design business, and Neil eventually left the trade entirely, becoming a casual storeman.

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[51] Stephen Noyes, interview with author, 20 February 2012.

[52] Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

Another factor was that once electronic typesetting came in to practice, the compositing trade was seen as more 'appropriate' for women to enter, and many did.[53] This had complicated results, both positive and negative; it meant that while the pre-press trades welcomed women, the perceived feminisation of compositing changed public perceptions of the skilled nature of typesetting.[54] By the 1980s the proportion of female compositors at the Gov was increasing, as the Gov had been encouraging the uptake of female apprentices since the mid-1970s.[55] The important point for now is that the influx of women into the Composing Section in the 1970s meant that by the 1980s, the Gov's compositors were less inclined to see their trade as a purely masculine stronghold, particularly compared to the press-machinists.

This is not to suggest that gender was absent from workplace discourse, however. Stephen Noyes reflected on his technical training as a compositor:

> I know basically, in the class that I had [at Sydney Tech], it was made up more of young females, than it was young male apprentices … And whether that had to do with the way that it was going, because of keyboards and computers, and they were, you know, pretty good on the keyboard skills. I'm not sure <pause> I know in the photocomposition side of it, there wasn't the heavy lifting, and the ink and the dirt and grime and playing around with lead ingots and things. So maybe it was starting to lean to a little bit more female oriented.[56]

The near simultaneous arrival of computer keyboards and female apprentices was often regarded as a 'natural' confluence of events.

In Bob Law's description of the retraining period, he suggests that the younger *and* female

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[53] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit., pp. 25–40; Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language', pp. 89–106.

[54] R. Reed, 'Journalism and technology practice', pp. 220–21.

[55] H. Ferguson (1981), *Report on the Equal Employment Opportunity Project at the NSW Government Printing Office*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney. The experiences of tradeswomen (and non-tradeswomen) at the Gov is addressed in the following two chapters.

[56] Stephen Noyes, interview with author, 20 February 2012.

compositors were perceived as a threat, because of their assumed technical competence at computers and typing.

> It was pretty hard to get used to, and I was <pause> although I started the whole [retraining] thing first, there is always someone coming up behind you, who is a bit younger, and can grasp it easier, and that was the case. There was always these younger people. And by this time there was a lot of girls working there, and they could understand it a lot easier than what we found it.[57]

Bob's statement is telling because of his use of a collective pronoun, specifically separating the traditional compositor tradesmen from others, namely, newly-apprenticed women and younger men. The workplace divisions were felt not just in terms of gender, but also along generational lines, and for a workplace perceived as 'late' to take up new technologies, workers sometimes choose to ally themselves actively with new machinery, even though that machinery may have undermined their original apprenticed skill.

Individualised approaches to technological retraining

While not all the compositors I interviewed were positive about the introduction of computers, most felt that it was an inevitable process. It was experienced as a necessary but regrettable 'loss of character' in the industry.[58] The retrained compositors who were not comfortable working directly with computers were often placed in managerial positions or in work using negatives and light tables. A few older compositors chose to retire. Some former compositors became very adept in computer typesetting, systems management, graphic design, electronic document management and desktop publishing. It is important to remember, however, that this was not a transition that these compositors had anticipated when they entered the industry; it was forced upon them by circumstance, timing and by the decisions made by their employers and, to a lesser

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[57] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

[58] It is here I must acknowledge a potential skewing in my findings: because I was interviewing former print workers in 2011 to 2013, the passage of time meant that I tended to find the compositors who had been younger men in the 1980s. The compositors who were nearing retirement in the 1980s were less likely to be alive, or to make themselves available for interview.

extent, their union. Compositors had to decide whether to 'go with the technology' or leave the trade entirely.

As a response to this impending technical transition, many compositors acted individually to save themselves from technical redundancy and perceived de-skilling. At their own initiative, they took steps to ensure their survival, aligning themselves with particular skill-sets and technologies that would increase their employability. This involved self-initiated education and retraining, often in addition to the retraining provided by the Gov. For example, some bought typewriters or rudimentary computers and others sought help from their family members in order to learn to type.

Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville explained that some compositors took steps as early as the 1960s to ensure their readiness for the change. Lindsay had always wanted to be a Monotype operator, as he did not like getting his hands dirty (and, remember, a Monotype had a standard qwerty keyboard). Becoming a Monotype operator at the Gov was no easy feat; it was a high-status position and to gain Monotype placement in the 1960s one had to have Government Printer VCN Blight's favour. I asked Lindsay how he worked towards becoming a Monotype operator.

> I went and did this course, as <pause> to learn how to type. That was in the old school of Sec Studies, they called it, Secretarial Studies, and the only time they had was 6 o'clock on a Friday night. So they did this Typewriting for Compositors course … It was run by a Monotype operator who'd come from the Gov, Alan Cohen. And he got the course together, and there were other guys there – Linotype operators – who could see the technology changing, and I was one of the younger ones at the time.[59]

[59] Lindsay Somerville, interview with author, 15 December 2011.

Former compositor Tim Guy also taught himself to type on a qwerty keyboard, benefiting from his wife's work as a typing teacher:

> Luckily my wife, at that stage we just got married and she taught typing. Just once or twice a week. <pause> Her nephew or niece or something, she owned a college in Parramatta, and she just taught a couple of nights a week to get some extra money … I just went in and sat there. I got bored one night, and I thought, 'I'll take the cover off this machine and I'll have a go'. So, it was good.[60]

In 1972 Tim was apprenticed at the Gov in hand-and-machine compositing and, as we shall see further on, he embraced the change to computer typesetting, enjoying the challenge of each new computer system he came across.

Another former compositor, Rudi Kolbach, also took individual initiative outside of work to train himself to type. He was apprenticed as a hand-and-machine compositor at the Gov in 1957 and worked briefly as a Linotype operator. He left the Gov in 1963 to become a sales representative and then went back into compositing work, at Cumberland Newspapers. Rudi explained how some of the Linotype operators at Cumberland 'had nervous breakdowns worrying about having to learn a typewriter keyboard'.[61] He explained his own survival:

> I myself went to an auction, and bought myself a typewriter, so I could learn the typewriter keyboard.[62]

Because Rudi moved into sales, he felt he had saved himself from the worst impacts of technological change:

> It wasn't my purpose in moving out of the practical side of the trade, I just wanted to get out and try something different. I saw these sales reps coming in, dressed up and driving around in company cars, and this, that and the other, and I thought, 'this is for me' … I left the industry before

[60] Tim Guy, interview with author, 24 July 2013.

[61] Rudi Kolbach, interview with author, 12 December 2011.

[62] ibid.

> they eventually insisted that people start to learn the typewriter keyboard. And I only had to learn the typewriter keyboard when I started to use a laptop computer for my work and so forth. Having been a Linotype operator, and being able to utilise all my fingers, once I started to learn the layout of the keyboard, I find it very easy now. Sometimes I can go on a very quick burst of typing, until I make an error, then I slow down. If I had'a stayed on, and had to learn the typewriter keyboard at the time, that would have been tough. That really would have been tough.[63]

Other compositors left the Gov when they sensed that newer technologies would destroy their enjoyment of their work. Stephen Noyes left the Gov in 1984:

> You know, when I first started there I enjoyed the hand-setting and machine-setting, and you know, imposition of pages and things like that. … And I enjoyed it because it was pretty, sort of, a physical job. But as things started to change, and the photocomposition come in, I'm thinkin', 'everybody's gonna start sittin' behind a computer here', and I wasn't really lookin' forward to that.[64]

While Stephen left the Gov to avoid computers, he later retrained in computer typesetting and worked for a newspaper on the NSW Central Coast. This future in computing was not something he could foresee while he was at the Gov:

> Basically I think it was just the whole change. I mean, I used to enjoy the physical side of it, and I just couldn't see myself doin' that type of work. But in the end … I ended up goin' to a newspaper, which was the *Central Coast Express* <pause> and I ended up staying there for 13 years and I was a typesetter! … But that's where I basically learnt some more skills in layout and design and keyboard skills, and I think we were using Quark Express. <pause> I couldn't see all that at the Government Printing

[63] ibid.

[64] Stephen Noyes, interview with author, 20 February 2012.

> Office, all I could see was people sitting there, basically typing a whole lot of information and it coming out as something else.[65]

When Stephen did learn to type, it was at technical training school and at his new job after he left the Gov. Typing 'was a bit of a slow old slog for me',[66] he said.

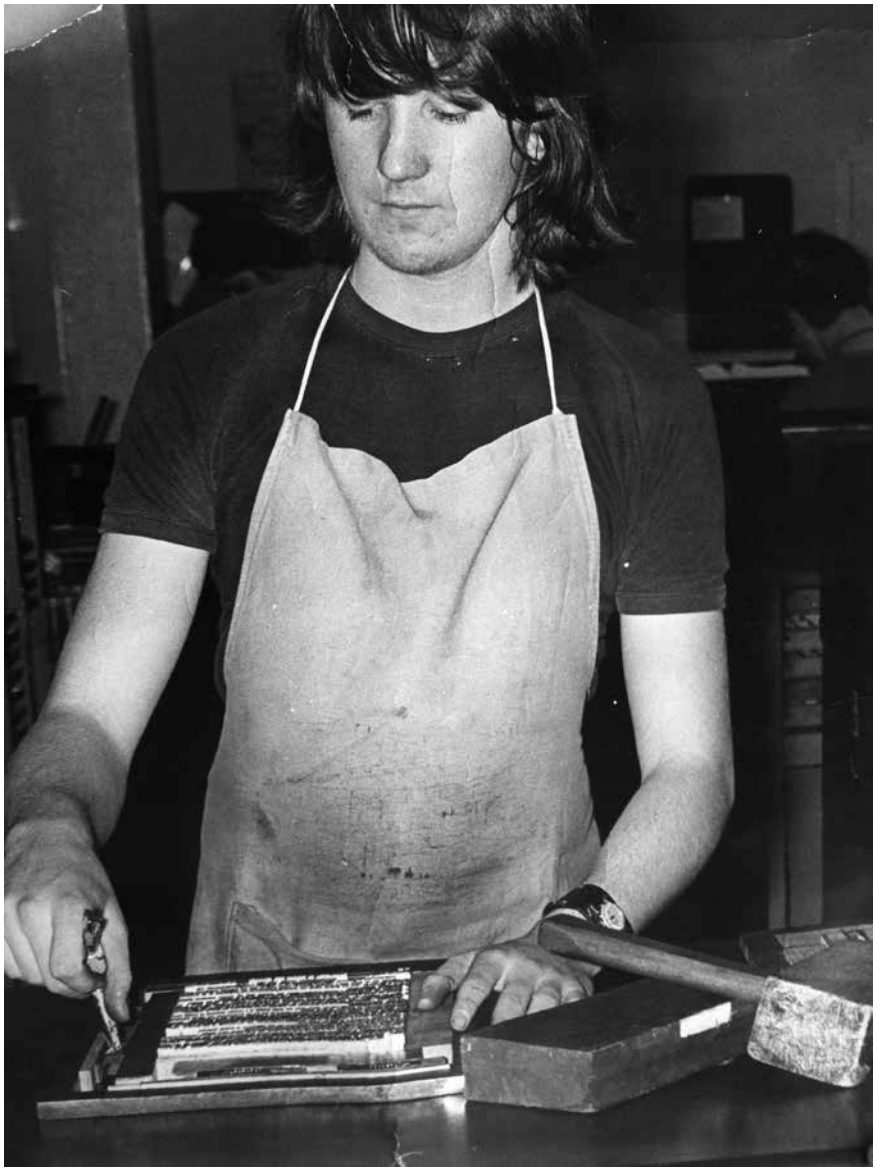

Fig. 81 **Compositor Stephen Noyes, as an apprentice, 1978**. Courtesy of Stephen Noyes. '[This photo is] one of me locking some type up in a chase on a slab (16 years old, I still have the watch but not the hair).' – Stephen Noyes.

[65] ibid.

[66] ibid.

In some cases the Gov's management explicitly relied on its employees' privately gained technical competence. For example, the Delairco retraining program for the Gov's former compositors did not provide training in formatting. 'We must rely on people who have done this on other machines,' reads a meeting minute from April 1984.[67] To help prompt a private interest in computers in general, Don West as Government Printer initiated a 'Computer Interest Group' in 1983, where 'interested staff' were encouraged to attend and play with a Wang VS–50 computer during their lunch-break. The Computer Interest Group invitation stated that the aim of the group was to provide a 'forum for self-development'.[68] Don reflected on this process in 2012:

> So we sat down, we gave people in the organisation the opportunities to take part in this. The jobs were advertised, people applied for the jobs, they went through normal interview processes and quite a few people sort of moved from what had been an old technology life to a new technology life, and some of them adapted very quickly and very well, it was quite surprising. One young guy sticks in my mind, I can't think of his name, but he was a stereotyper, and a stereotyper used to pour molten lead to make flongs and print from them. He really had no career opportunity as a stereotyper. But to get people thinking the right way we bought a couple of Apple computers. (They weren't laptops at the time, they didn't make those in those days.) We set them up in the Boardroom and let the staff play with them and do what they like. And this young guy took off, and he came in one day with a disk and said,
>
> 'I want you to play this', so we played it, and he'd written the software for a coloured steam engine! [It] ran and blew steam and made noises and whatever. It was fantastic, what he did. And he did that on his own bat at home, without any instruction, just by reading the manuals, and he was

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67 'Introduction of Computer Phototypesetting' (1984), extraordinary meeting held on 11 April, meeting minutes, NSW Government Printing Office. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2100, NSW State Records.

68 'Computers Interest Group' (1983), *Staff Circular*, 22 April, NSW Government Printing Office, internal document. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2092, NSW State Records.

> writing binary code for it. Anyway, we got a television – got a screen – and had that up running in the foyer and that tickled everybody's heart and sort of made people think about what they could do, what was going on, and that was a great turn-around.[69]

This is one example of the way in which individually-driven training and self-directed computer competence was overtly encouraged by the Gov. It is also an example of the workplace encouraging a form of unofficial creative expression and technological tinkering.[70]

Graham Smith (also known as Bluey) was employed in the lithographic section in the 1960s and he was mentioned a number of times by interview participants; he was famous for getting his arm stuck in a Roland lithographic press. Don did not know about the arm incident (it was before his time), but he did recall Graham's embrace of computer technologies:

> There was another guy, Graham Smith. Graham worked in the photo-engraving section. He took to it like a duck to water … He became quite proficient and involved in what we were doing, and he became a good code writer and systems analyst. It was interesting to see how these guys just sort of changed their whole demeanour.[71]

Of course, it was in Don's interest to present his management of the Gov as fortuitously smooth and positive. Nonetheless, it is significant that he framed the success of technological change around concepts such as morale, self-education and (however obliquely), class:

> I think the thing I feel most satisfied about was lifting the status of the people working in the Printing Office. They were pretty downtrodden when I went there. And come the '80s, when we really started the retraining programs, intense retraining programs, they became different sort of people. It lifted their spirits and their morale and … their interest in what was going on. A lot of them became far more advanced than

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[69] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

[70] See Chapter Nine for further details on unofficial creative practices and material culture at the Gov.

[71] ibid.

> anybody ever envisaged they would. Some went off to [technical college]. Some went to university. I think it just changed them, you know, it became a pretty worthwhile thing.[72]

While Don's description of the changeover was broadly positive, some compositors did not welcome the new computers at all.

Bob Law was adamant that it was typing that he hated most about the technological change. He describes how he 'hated the sight' of a qwerty keyboard:

> Oh, the re-learning to type was pretty difficult, especially for <pause> for everyone. But from a Linotype operator's point of view, the two keyboards were totally different from the computerised keyboard, the qwerty keyboard. <pause> It's massive, I mean, the Linotype operator's keyboard had 90 keys on it, I don't know how many is on a normal keyboard. But that was hard. Before it all started, the very first thing, they had to re-teach people to type. They gave me, as the guinea pig, a qwerty keyboard, and they sent me to another place in town – a printing place – that had gone through the same process … They just sent me there to show me this keyboard. I hated the sight of it, it was just a qwerty keyboard and you were trying to do with 40 keys, the same that you could do with 90. I found it hard. It was a case of fingers up and down, whereas like typists do these days <mimics gentle typing> whereas with a Linotype operator's keyboard it was at a big angle, and you could sort of spread your hands out. On a qwerty keyboard the keys are close together, very close together. I found it hard, but you got used to it. Everyone had to go through that process. Some guys decided they didn't like that too much, so they just gave away Linotype operating or Monotype operating altogether, and just went to be a comp or a reader. <pause> Especially the piece operators who had spent a lot of time, you know, getting their skill really honed, to earn

[72] ibid.

> a lot of money, and then to have to stop that, all of a sudden, and have to learn this other new-fangled thing, you know? <pause> The one machine would do what five people used to do before. And you had to try and think what that person would do, the whole lot. It was a big change for everybody. And that was when the place, as far as I'm concerned, started to go down the drain. People found that, 'Oh, maybe this is not for me.'[73]

Bob links the decline of the Gov very firmly to the introduction of computers; in his view, the new technology took away jobs, degraded the labour process and caused pain for skilled compositors who found themselves forced to retrain.

Geoff Hawes also admitted that he had difficulty learning to type on a qwerty keyboard and he was appointed as supervisor of the Linotype room in the final days of that system at the Gov. His explanation of the situation vacillates from his personal story to observations on those he worked around and supervised:

> I used to use the Linotype, but I just couldn't pick up the qwerty keyboard for the life of me. You know? Yeah, it was just something I couldn't pick up. I tried. <pause> It was something completely new. It took all of their concentration and all their efforts to do it right. Once they got it mastered it sort of flowed fairly easily. But you know, I mean, a lot of the guys, as I said, the older people, they resented it. There was a bit of resentment there. They said, 'There's no skill in it now.'[74]

Geoff's story also includes an earlier recollection of a warning given by an older compositor:

> I can remember when it first happened, we hadn't been doing it for long, and one of the old blokes, he said,
> 'You just watch, computers are gonna ruin this trade.' And I said,

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[73] Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

[74] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

> 'Nah, this is the way to go!' and he said,
> 'You just mark my words, young Geoffrey.'
> Sure enough, everybody that ended up with a computer all of
> a sudden became a graphic designer.[75]

On being 'in the technology'

Terry Hagenhofer tells a similar story of a warning from an elder, an overseer. Terry was initially apprenticed in hand-and-machine composing in 1973, but after one year he transferred to camera operation. In retrospect, Terry explained, the compositors were retrained in new technologies, while camera operation 'died' as a trade. I asked Terry why he moved to camera operation:

> I think it seemed *safer*. It was sort of a bit more modern. You know, you started to think, 'They can't be doing this hand and machine composing, it's going to change'. <pause> The old Overseer of General Composing, when I was changing, he said,
> 'Mate, you're doing the wrong thing', he said, 'You should be staying here. They are *always* going to need somebody to punch in the information, but what you're doing down there, if that changes, it'll be something *completely* different.' And I thought,
> 'Oh what would you know, Dick McReedy?' You know, nice old bloke, but I just thought, 'Oh, that can't be right.' He *was* right. Because the guys that stayed in the composing – when they were retrained to be on whatever the computer was … *They* got retrained. Whereas, my trade died and there wasn't really a transition.[76]

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[75] ibid.

[76] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011. Italics indicate speaker's emphasis.

Barry Skewes offers the other side of this perspective. Having the benefit of institutional retraining at the Gov, Barry saw himself and the other younger compositors as being 'in the technology', while others at the Gov were left out:

> It probably affected other sections more than us, because we were in the technology, so we sort of embraced it, and went along with it, but probably didn't see what it was doing to a lot of other sections, I suppose.[77]

This is a significant perspective because Barry doesn't focus on the compositors as victims of the change and sees himself as being part of 'progress', rather than outside of it.

Fig. 82 **Former Linotype operator Alan Holten (left) and compositor Tim Guy working on desktop editing, 1987.** Both Tim and Alan retrained in computer typesetting and programming from a background in hot-metal typesetting. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 32408. 'We were photographed because this was the first offsite desktop publishing job that was done by the Government Printing Office. The document we were working on was called the *Background to careers*.' – Tim Guy.

[77] Barry Skewes, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

Former compositor Tim Guy was also 'in the technology'; he enthusiastically took up whatever computer system was being deployed at the time. Learning the language of computer programming was a key part of Tim's ability to carve out a new career for himself, once traditional typesetting had disappeared. Tim said:

> Computerwise, I didn't have a problem, I think. Yeah, whatever they threw at us was good. 'Give me something else.' It was good. So, Penta's one language. IBM's another language. Macintosh, I did a whole lot of alpha and beta testing for Apple. So there's another system to learn. Then there was the Sun system, uh, Unix, I don't know if you're aware of that. Unix systems. And then, the next one that ran the company was Nobel, Nobel software. So I had to try and do all that. So it was great. Whatever they brought out, you soon got the hang of it. It was just a different way of doin' things. <laughs>[78]

Tim also explained how he and a former Linotype operator, Alan Holten, [Figs 78, 82] had survived the transition by specialising in particular elements of electronic typesetting, particularly in programming. By showing their *individual* capabilities, they attempted to ensure their career survival. Not only that, but as this quote suggests, they enjoyed the challenge:

> Tim: It was fun. I <pause> there was a fellow there called Alan Holten. He came from the Linotype. He was a pieceworker, so he got paid for the speed he went, without making mistakes. So he had a fairly easy transition into Penta … he got an earlier start at doing all the Microbee – going all through different levels – and then transferred up to Penta.
> *Jesse: But he'd still have to learn how to type on a different keyboard?*
> Tim: Yeah. Yep. That's right. But he managed to do it. Not as fast – he couldn't do the speed … But he was quite good at picking up mistakes, or to say,
> 'Ok, here's a page of type, and if I hit this key on the keyboard, it's gonna drop a three point space between that heading and this next line.'

[78] Tim Guy, interview with author, 24 July 2013.

> So he programmed each job. He'd do the program, but he couldn't pick up where he'd made mistakes in the program. And that's where they got me. 'Tim, can you give us a hand, we can't find out what we've done wrong.' So I only looked for a second, I said, 'There it is, there you put two character returns and this has doubled, tripled the spacing in it.' … So I got the programming side of it, and then yes, it was good.[79]

Former compositor John Lee was similarly comfortable with learning newer technologies. John was apprenticed outside of the Gov and he joined the public service as a fully indentured compositor in 1962. His career took him from composing into document reproduction, then into scheduling, desktop editing and computerised page layout. Like Tim Guy, John eagerly focused on learning each new technology that he encountered.

> I was an habitual learner, so it was a lot easier for me to get stuck into things like photocomposition and computers, than it was for some of the old fellas, or the young blokes, they just didn't like it. So it, technological change, didn't concern me at all.[80]

Note here how John's emphasis is on his individual capacity, as opposed to the collective terminology used by the more traditional compositors. The language of both these men speaks of an individualised labour experience, with less emphasis on the collective identity of being 'one of the comps'. These men allied themselves with computer technologies and harnessed particular specialised skill sets, as a (sometimes unconscious) strategy of survival in this new regime of public sector job insecurity.

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[79] ibid.

[80] John Lee, interview with author, 2 August 2012.

Fig. 83 **Operator using the Autologic MTU machines, 1985**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 43398.

Neil and Barry also spoke of the on-the-job discoveries they made in computer coding. The times that they spent 'playing' with the computers led them to learn about how these new machines functioned. Here, they recollect using the Comp-Edit computers, the system that was introduced in 1981, before the larger scale Penta system:

> Neil: Me, I worked on Comp-Edit for many years, and I preferred that
>
> sort of work because you did more of a
>
> *Barry: It was jobbing*
>
> Neil: More of the interesting stuff, they called it the jobbing work.
>
> *Barry: Remember those things we used to make?*
>
> Neil: Oh we used to make letterheads, compliments slips, business cards[81]
>
> *Barry: I built a car! Remember, it was like a car, made out of blocks and things.*
>
> *Because you'd have to put in, like, 'machine go to this spot here and draw a line'.*

[81] Neil's comment is a reference to the industry practice of 'foreign orders' – workers making extra items 'on the side', i.e., in a clandestine manner without a work-ticket. See Chapter Nine for an exploration of this practice.

And he'd put that code in. 'Do this' ... and eventually I drew a whole car.

I printed it out, you know?

<Neil laughs>

Jesse: So you were playing around with this machinery, figuring it out?

Barry: Pretty much.

Neil: Oh, yeah. Foreign orders were always an interesting sideline. You know, someone wanted something made up and printed.

Barry: You'd have to get to know the machines inside out, so you did little things like that, just to see if they could be done and to see if you could break it.

<both laugh>

Neil: Oh, we were pretty good, we didn't break too many.[82]

The compositors' attitudes to those graceless beige boxes indicate a complex and paradoxical relationship with technological change. On the one hand, for the printers who used them, these bland, opaque plastic devices replaced machinery whose workings they understood just by looking at it. The computer's functions were seen to threaten livelihoods, careers, hard-won skills and a craftsman's status. On the other hand, the arrival of computers was also experienced as exciting, as signalling supposed progress, efficiency, cleanliness, speed and ease. It meant the Gov was finally 'catching up' with the rest of the printing industry. Being 'up to date' with the latest machines could also inspire confidence and hopes for future job prospects.

At the same time as neo-liberal economic policy was bringing the Government Printing Office's existence into question, the workers themselves were increasingly favouring individual interests, over collective practice. The acquisition of technology – and the attempted control of technological knowledge – were two key strategies that both employers *and* workers used to attempt to save themselves from potential redundancy. In this way, the workplace values and attitudes at the Gov moved from collective practices towards self-interested actions that were about individual financial survival and self-realisation.

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[82] Neil Lewis and Barry Skewes, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

Lingering material memories of hot-metal

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, the compositors saw their old machinery dismantled and sold off. These decommissioned machines were visible remnants of the end of hot-metal, tangible reminders of the end of their apprenticed trade. The presence of those redundant objects could be powerful shapers of workplace culture and morale. They were also linked to perceptions of skill (or the loss of skill). When I asked Geoff Hawes whether he felt he was gaining or losing skills in this process, he said:

> Ah <pause> losing. We were all sad, because we could actually see *things* disappearing. We had a Ludlow machine. That went. Then all these other things went. And they brought in photocopiers. It was quite daunting for a lot of people. One minute we're doing hot-metal, and the next minute, it's gone![83]

While hot-metal typesetting came to be seen as 'dead', it lingered on, through entrenched workplace practices, through disused machines taking up space in the factory and through memory. Like the 'phantom intermediaries' described in Maggie Mort and Mike Michael's study of technological and worker redundancy in the nuclear submarine industry, there was a phantom presence of hot-metal at the Gov.[84] Mort and Michael focused on a workplace similar to the Gov, in the sense that they wrote about an industrial enterprise in decline in the late twentieth century and facing the prospect of closure. In their definition, phantom intermediaries haunt workplaces that are in the process of change and they continue to play a role in the relations that unravel in those sites.[85] Phantom intermediaries may come in the form of redundant technologies – not yet discarded, pushed to the side of the shop floor. We have seen one example of the presence of such objects in Chapter Two where Bob Day is described pretending to type at a decommissioned Monotype keyboard. Phantom intermediaries may also come in the form

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[83] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

[84] M. Mort & M. Michael (1998), 'Human and technological 'redundancy': Phantom intermediaries in a nuclear submarine industry', *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 355–400. See also M. Mort (2002), *Building the Trident network: A study of the enrollment of people, knowledge, and machines*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass., London.

[85] ibid., p. 358.

of craftspeople who are older and/or unwilling or unable to retrain in computer technologies (and yet who remain employed, at least in the short term). Phantom intermediaries also linger in workplaces in the form of entrenched labour processes and practices that stay in place, notwithstanding new management or new technologies that render such actions unnecessary.

The phantom intermediaries of hot-metal lingered on in the professional skills that hot-metal compositors had gained during their apprenticeships. In existing literature (outlined in the previous chapter), the compositors' story is often framed in terms of de-skilling. This is slightly contradicted by the oral sources for this project; the compositors I interviewed often spoke of some of their skills *continuing* on into the present day. The apprenticeship experiences that had formed these compositors in the final decades of hot-metal typesetting had left them with a firm belief in the superiority of their skills, compared to those who had never worked in hot-metal. These former compositors speak of how their grounding in hot-metal typesetting gave them unparalleled skills in typesetting, graphic design, typographic understanding, visual intelligence and literacy, and they feel that some of these capacities carry over from their previous trade into their professional practice with computers and graphic design. Here is an excerpt from when I asked Barry and Neil whether they felt that they had gained or lost skills in the transition to computerised typesetting:

> **Jesse: In terms of skill, did you feel like you were gaining, or**
>
> *Barry: Yeah!*
>
> Neil: I think gain. I think the training that we had with hot-metal was a skill that you never really lost. Even today with the desktop publishing programs, you still sorta use some of that skill when you're designing work, whereas people that have just learned desktop publishing, they don't have that sorta knowledge and <pause> you can see it in <pause>
>
> *Barry: You can pick up a lot of stuff today and go*
>
> Neil: You can see it in the printed materials, the difference <pause>
>
> *Barry:* <mock disdainful> *Who taught them to do that?*[86]

[86] Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

Although Neil and Barry spoke over the top of each other, they essentially said two things: a) that learning computers represented a knowledge gain, and b) notwithstanding computerisation, some of their fundamental skills from the hot-metal days were retained.

Compositors commonly bemoan the lack of professional proof-reading and subediting in contemporary publications. Traditionally, there was a strong degree of pride in the literacy attained by compositors[87] and it is interesting to see that this pride has been retained. Rogers, Friedman and Cockburn have observed that compositors clearly distinguished themselves from the rest of the working class, defining themselves as elite, literate, skilled craftsmen, *not* labourers.[88] This sentiment lasted well into the twentieth century, as is apparent in Bob Law's discussion about compositors covertly editing the documents they typeset:

> Bob: You couldn't become a compositor or a Linotype operator unless you had a *really* really good grasp of the English language, and did well at school at spelling. Because invariably you were a better speller than the people who were correcting your work. You'd see them lookin' up dictionaries, trying to think, 'Oh, is this the way to do it?' So it was very, very important. If you'd just managed to scrape by English at school, you were wastin' your time.
>
> *Jesse: I'm also curious about the role that Linotype operators played, to some degree, in editing.*
>
> Bob: Mmm mmm <pause> That happened all the time. Bit of poetic licence as it were. They all – especially the piece-operators – they all got around in their dustcoats with a pencil behind their ear, and if they're typing and they thought, 'Oh, that's spelled wrong', pick up the pencil and cross it out, irrespective of whether the author wanted it spelled wrong, or they'd change it <pause> even syntax, they'd change it. Because they thought they knew better. And nine times out of 10 they did.[89]

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87 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 16.

88 T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. xv; C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 16.

89 Bob Law, interview with author, 27 February 2012.

The knowledge of hot-metal typesetting and hand composing is so strong in some of these ex-compositors, many of them could talk about it for hours. In the interviews for the Government Printing Office Oral History Project, a good deal of time was given to the technical description of hot-metal machinery and old composing techniques. For example, former compositor and designer George Woods described hand-setting at length. This is but a small extract of his interview transcript:

> You know what a type stick is? … Well it's a metal stick as they call it, with a slide on it, and you place the type, which is Monotype, and you place it letter by letter into it, to a prescribed width. You space it out by hand, and you set the next line, and the next line, until you get enough to transfer it to a galley, which was … <trails off> It sounds archaic, but that's it. And having placed it into a galley you keep making it into a page. It's quite fragile, and the galley itself is sitting on what they call a frame. And the frame is on an angle, so that you always put it this way. … The galley was sorta like this, it had a lip around here, like when I say a lip, sort of like a lip like that <draws on paper>, and you placed your type here, you keep running it, line for line. And you just make it into a page that you want. And when you've made it into the page, the depth and you sort of, you have to press it, just to make sure that it's firm. You then slide it off onto what they call a slab … They used to tie it with a string, and it had to be bound several times. Not so tight that it would spring, but tight enough so that it was strong enough to keep it together. And you'd sorta lift the galley and slide it off onto a slab. Now, a slab was like a, I'm drawing upside down here but anyway, it sort of a rather large, heavy, solid steel block, with legs on it. The reason it was so heavy and strong, it could have been about that thick. <pause> And you'd slide the <pause> slide the type onto it, off the galley – the galley'd be sort of on an angle, so that it slid onto it. But that's only one page. Now, print comes in various formats, it either comes in display pages – like individual – or it comes in book

> form, or something like that. And when you produce it in book form you have what they call chases, they call them chases. They're steel, and they're thick and strong, and you place the pages in such a way <draws more> so that these pages fit within these steel bars, they can't be moved. And once the page is placed in there at a predetermined position, and it's spaced apart – you space it down the middle. What you call a gutter of a book, you know? When you open the book up you've got what you call a spine. But the type only goes from here to here. So that's called a gutter. They're the margins, you still call it a margin, but in terms of this it was the gutter. And the headspace and all that, so that it was ... and the forme was shaped in such a way <pause> imposed. We call it imposition actually <pause> it was imposed in such a format so that when it was printed you'd just fold it and fold it and it was readable: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, <pause> and it used to go from <pause> it depended on the size of the publications, some of them were small, and others were quite large, like newspaper format or something.[90]

While much of this interview content could be dismissed as tedious and overly technical, what it offers is a significant historical record about the continuity of hand-typesetting practices *well into the 1980s*. In addition, it is important to understand that the oral history interview process afforded these former compositors another avenue to show their continuing in-depth knowledge and craft skill. Many of their hand-skills in hot-metal typesetting and hand-composing were thought to be 'lost', and the interview process itself allowed them another forum to express the attainment of these skills and share this specialist knowledge.

That sense of pride is also represented through compositors' mementoes – the objects and documents that they have kept since their apprenticeships. Many compositors presented their indenture certificates to me when I interviewed them, and almost all could remember the exact date that they started at the Gov. Composing sticks were also frequently kept – and shown to

[90] George Woods, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

me during the interview – as evidence of the skill they had attained in hand-setting individual letters of type. Barry and Neil spoke of their first encounter with setting sticks:

> *Barry: Oh. It was alright, it was a lot of* <pause> *like, in the hot metal days* <pause> *it freaked me right out in the first couple of days when they said 'you've gotta buy a setting stick', and they're worth $200 or something.* <Neil laughs> *And then you've gotta put these type into the – 'you've gotta do what?'*
> Neil: Yeah, yeah.
> *Barry: And build your lines, you know, incredible sorta stuff. I mean you never built too many, as an apprentice, but you always had to have the skill there.*
> Neil: Mmm. I've still got mine.[91]

Without being asked to, Stephen Noyes photographed his composing tools and sent me the photograph. [Fig. 85] When I asked him about the setting stick, he responded:

> Oh yes, I've still got that. Composing stick, and me type gauge, and the original knife that I used to use. I don't know, I've always kept 'em and thought maybe somebody might ask me what this is one day, or I might be able to show me grandkids if I ever get any, that this is what I used to do. I don't think there'd be too many people who – especially the young ones – who would realise how it used to be done.[92]

Similarly, Geoff Hawes preserved his setting stick (along with *Staff Journals*, photographs, and other memorabilia). [Fig. 84] He explained that this was part of keeping 'in touch' with his old trade. Geoff explained:

> Yeah, oh, we all kept sort of mementoes because we didn't want to lose touch with what we did, because we all did four- or five-year apprenticeships <pause> and we were really proud. We loved the industry, everyone did. Loved it.[93]

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[91] Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

[92] Stephen Noyes, interview with author, 20 February 2012.

[93] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

Fig. 84 **Compositor Geoff Hawes' original setting stick,** photograph by the author in 2012.

Fig. 85 **Stephen Noyes' composing tools,** photograph by Stephen Noyes, reproduced with permission.

Ambiguity, obsolescence and uncertainty

> Morale was terrible. A lot because we didn't know what the future was going to hold. We all had mortgages, families, you know? … There was a lot of <pause> not panic, but a lot of doubt. People were scared – what was going to happen? Then, once it all started going, all those feelings sort of alleviated. We thought, OK, this is going to be alright. Then everything was going along smooth, and then the next thing you know, they said – 'We're closing!'[94]

In the nine-year period before the Gov closed down in 1989, it brought computers into its domain. First, there was the introduction of Comp-Edit and Microbee computers to train the compositors in the early 1980, and then the wholesale introduction of the Penta phototypesetting system in 1984–1985. By 1989 the Penta system was 'showing its age,'[95] and the impending obsolescence of this expensive computer system was becoming obvious. Would the government pay for major improvements to the Gov's computer typesetting systems, to bring this service into the 1990s? As desktop publishing became a viable option for individuals on home and office computers, the Gov's precarious position was becoming clear to its employees. If the capacity of home computers meant that employees could typeset and print their documents at home, it meant government offices could do it too. The role of a specialist government printer was still somewhat necessary (for government publications such as *Hansard* and the *Government Gazette*), but it was no longer essential to the production of printed material for government departments. Now that anyone with a computer was able to typeset his or her own work, the very existence of the Government Printing Office – in its centralised, traditional form – came to seem less and less viable.

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[94] ibid.

[95] Tim Guy, interview with author, 24 July 2013.

While many former compositors from the Gov succeeded in staying employed throughout this transitional period, the distinctive culture of the hot-metal composing room was irrevocably lost, and along with it, whole sets of practices, traditions and ways of working and making all but disappeared. Although it must be acknowledged that traditional printing culture was patriarchal and exclusive, what it provided for printers was a powerful and proud sense of having an occupation, a specialised hand skill, a craft. I do not say this to romanticise the craft of hot-metal typesetting; rather, it can be said that with the introduction of computer technologies, ex-compositors were aware that they were no longer elite experts.[96] Their children seemed more adept at computers than they were. These workers became unsure what to call themselves in their new technology jobs: keyboard operators? systems managers? desktop publishing experts? technical assistants? data-entry personnel?[97] Not only was the internal mechanical functioning of the new computer technology opaque and impossible to fathom; the workers also had difficulty defining *themselves*. The qualities of a 'good compositor' were no longer easy to measure.[98]

As we have seen, some of the compositors at the Gov welcomed the introduction of computers; some were very willing to retrain and welcomed the challenge. But in many senses, this was still a decision made out of fear. If they did not stay 'in the technology', where would they end up? While public service employment had once seemed the most secure job one could find, this dynamic was changing in the 1980s, as state and federal governments increasingly closed down service departments and outsourced their labour to the private sector (and overseas). While blue-collar workers were first affected by this shift, managerial staff soon felt the impacts of public sector restructuring and 'rationalisation'.[99] Most compositors had only high-school education and their manual-skills were almost all related to traditional printing processes. We have seen how some of the compositors attempted to ally themselves with the new technologies, either by putting themselves through retraining or being willing to supervise the computer typesetting of other compositors.

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[96] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 105.

[97] R. Sennett, *The corrosion of character*, pp. 68–69.

[98] ibid., p. 71.

[99] L. Colley, op. cit., p. 143.

Keeping up with swiftly changing desktop publishing technologies was not an easy task. What replaced hot-metal typesetting was not permanent; rather, the increasingly computerised technologies that immediately replaced hot-metal itself soon became outmoded.[100] In the 1980s, people working in computer typesetting and desktop publishing were faced with successive waves of new computer technologies to learn, every few years. As a consequence, a 500-year-old tradition was lost and what has replaced it is ephemeral, intangible and swiftly obsolete.

As sociologist Richard Sennett has observed, the new, computerised service work was (and is) felt to lack the character or depth of meaning associated with having a life's work, or a craft skill.[101] Cockburn was aware of this sense of lack, even in 1983:

> In the hot-metal you have a tangible product. You hear the slug fall onto the galley, it is solid and you can burn your fingers on it. In the electronic system, 'you are not kind of seeing the product as such, it's all kind of invisible to you'. You *feel* less productive (irrationally perhaps) because the product is so ephemeral, either a sliver of punched paper tape you can only with difficulty decipher, or an invisible impression on a magnetic disc in some distant computer room you never visit.[102]

While the people interviewed in this project did not quite articulate the concept that Cockburn describes here, there are those who clearly link the decline of the Government Printing Office with the introduction of computers. Bob Law explains the pain of this technological and social transition quite explicitly:

> I was employed as a Linotype operator in the pre-press area … For me, in those days, the Government Printing Office was an absolute joy. Then, along came computerised typesetting and the beginning of the end of the printing industry as it had been for most of the century. The atmosphere changed, along with the guts of the building, which was transformed

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[100] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 84. Cockburn's quotes are from compositors interviewed for *Brothers*.

[101] R. Sennett, *The corrosion of character*, p. 68.

[102] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 101.

to accommodate the computers; big, clumsy, clunky things by today's standards, but state-of-the-art back then. The union took a bigger role in the place and caused a lot of angst amongst staff by calling for strikes over the new machinery about which they knew nothing … People who had seen their whole working lives as being part of the Printing Office suddenly started to resign … Several of the senior people in the organisation were swept aside to make way for what we would now call 'tech heads'. These people certainly knew about computers but had no idea how to run a printing business. The death of the Printing Office took five years, starting with the introduction of computerised typesetting in 1984, until the government of the day, fed up with continual strikes and printing cost over-runs, closed the office down in July 1989.[103]

Fig. 86 **Linotype operator Bob Law, 1978**, giving a demonstration to visitors during a paper seminar at the Government Printing Office. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 47067.

[103] Bob Law (2011), unsolicited printed statement, 24 November, received by author prior to oral history interview.

Bob's statement here suggests a dramatic clash of cultures: traditional, craft-based, working class labourers versus a rising technicist middle class. The former group may have been patriarchal and traditional in its dealings with those who were not skilled, white and male, but the new managers and leaders of the new technological systems were not part of any collective or community. They seemed to operate more as individuals; they allied themselves not so much with their colleagues as with the new technologies and with service industry ideals such as efficiency, productivity and growth.

By the late 1980s, the hot-metal compositors at the Gov who retrained in computer technologies found themselves transformed from craftsmen and craftswomen on the factory floor into technical experts, systems managers and data-entry personnel working in offices.[104] While this transition might be glibly interpreted as a gain for the workers – moving them from so-called blue-collar work to white-collar work – it would be a gross simplification to suggest that this situation was always experienced as a boon. The compositors' story is but one episode in Australia's move away from a protected, manufacturing industry towards a culture of neo-liberalism, de-industrialisation and a growing service economy.[105]

This case study also demonstrates what can be lost in such a move: camaraderie, communal identity, collectivity, steady commitment to a singular job task and the bespoke quality that accompanies the embodied experience of a manual craft.[106] This is not to say that the computerisation of the printing industry is wholly a disastrous affair. Retraining was a positive step for some workers, contributing as it did to individual self-esteem, adaptive technical ability and a multi-skilled career path. However, as Sennett has observed, the increasing drive toward occupational and technological 'flexibility' does not always require organisations to be flexible.

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[104] T. Rogers & N. Friedman, op. cit., p. xv. See also S. Hampson (1988), 'The management information system at the Queensland Government Printing Office', conference paper, Nineteenth Australasian Government Printers' Conference, 16 March. NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2104, NSW State Records.

[105] M. Webber & S. Weller, op. cit.

[106] R. Sennett (2008), *The craftsman*, Penguin, London and New York, p. 31.

Rather, it requires the workers to do the bending.[107] Not all former craftspeople were prepared to take that path, and those who did retrain found themselves in a new world that lacked the commitment, collective values, physical quality and legibility of traditional print and printing industry culture.[108]

[107] R. Sennett, *The corrosion of character*, p. 46.

[108] ibid., pp. 24–30.

PART III

CHALLENGES
&
CREATIVE RESILIENCE

7. Women in printing & the (re)making of factory spaces

Fig. 87 **A bookbinding assistant binding Australian Museum documents at the Government Printing Office, 1965**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 27658.

Introduction

The previous chapters in this dissertation have focused on the experiences of the majority group at the Gov, that is, the men. The dominant constructions surrounding craft masculinity and its relationship to technology have been scrutinised. However, to examine men's experience without acknowledging the women at the Gov would be remiss, as their respective working experiences differed greatly.[1] While women were in the minority at the Gov, there were a number of different paths that female employees could take there, along with a diversity of experiences. Indeed, the occupational and gender dynamics at the Gov altered substantially in the period between the 1960s and the 1980s, as the proportion of female employees grew and social structures transformed.

To provide an interpretative framework, this chapter first explores the history of women's labour in the printing industry. The following two chapters (this chapter and Chapter Eight) outline three distinct experiences had by women at the Gov: the role of non-tradeswomen, the experience of a manager and the challenges faced by female apprentices. After providing the historical background, this chapter hones in on the experiences of non-tradeswomen at the Gov, that is, printing 'table-hands', nurses and general assistants. This chapter then looks to the strategies mobilised by the Gov's only female senior manager, Pamela Pearce. The following chapter (Chapter 8) considers in more detail the trials faced by the Gov's first female apprentices to commence there in the 1970s and 1980s. While I do not claim that these three groups (non-tradeswomen, managers and apprentices) are the only loci for stories about women at this institution, this selection demonstrates the diversity of challenges faced by women working within a patriarchal and traditional printing institution at a time when the gendered division of labour was being reformulated in a broader social context.

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[1] I must acknowledge that this dissertation has not attended in detail to the experiences of other minorities at the Gov, such as migrants, persons with disabilities, and persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. It can be said that each of these groups were represented at the Gov, and by the 1980s the focus on anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunity had, to a small extent, brought their concerns out into the open. See for example: H. Ferguson (1981), *Report on the Equal Employment Opportunity Project at the NSW Government Printing Office*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney. However the primary source material uncovered for this project has not produced enough content to allow these areas to be a substantive focus for this particular dissertation, and there is certainly room here for further research. Since the emphasis of this dissertation is more towards the intersections of gender and technology, it makes more sense to focus on craft masculinity and on women's experiences in a male-dominated working environment.

One of the threads to hold these three stories together is the presence of design and embodied experience; each of these narratives speaks of something made, designed or physically manipulated, be it spatial, environmental or technological. The active making and re-making of things and spaces, and the forming of embodied knowledge about machinery, were strategies that women workers mobilised while working at the Gov. While historian Ava Baron has warned against an undue emphasis on women's bodies in labour history,[2] this research is not focused on embodiment in terms of women's physical difference. It seeks to move past generalisations about what were seen as women's weight and strength disadvantages by showing what they were actually capable of and the active strategies they undertook to carve out their own terrain in a male-dominated industrial context.

Fig. 88 **Typists at the Government Printing Office, 1966**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 2 – 33518. I have been unable to confirm precisely where in the building this took place. The two possibilities are the Document Reproduction section on the first floor, or the secretarial typing pool on the fifth floor. The linoleum flooring suggests the latter, but the high ceiling suggests the former. After looking at this photograph, former compositor Lindsay Somerville said: 'It was always a big deal to walk up to the office to see the girls up there.'

[2] A. Baron (2006), 'Masculinity, the embodied male worker, and the historian's gaze', *International Labor & Working-Class History*, vol. 69, Spring, pp. 143–60.

Before the mid-1970s, women at the Gov were generally employed in non-trade positions which were seen to be fairly menial. They worked as table-hands, machine-feeders, typists, office assistants, nurses, cleaners and so on. They were not remunerated well but if they were appointed as permanent members of the NSW Public Service, their jobs were relatively secure and provided the promise of an old-age pension upon retirement. Some of the older women at the Gov had been long-serving employees and they were perceived as motherly figures, well-liked by staff. As long as they did not attempt to play the part of men and instead acted as caring supporters of the higher-earning tradesmen, then the prevailing gender regime was confirmed and the women's presence was comfortably accepted.

The spaces they inhabited, however, were undeniably designed by men for other men to inhabit.[3] This was a dominant pattern for women's involvement in industrial labour for the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. As this chapter will show, there were particular ways in which non-tradeswomen at the Gov asserted their independence and enacted subtle resistance to the patriarchal social order. For some women at the Gov, the resourceful transformation of space allowed a creative outlet, a separate realm and a source of pride.

The final part of this chapter examines the experience of the only female executive manager to be appointed at the Gov. The appointment in 1985 of Pamela Pearce as the Chief of Division, Marketing, was a surprise to the more conservative forces at the Gov; they did not support the nomination of anyone outside of the printing industry, let alone a woman. One of Pamela's strategies was to 'make space' for her point of view, and to actively renew parts of the Gov in terms of design. For example, she transformed the appearance of the building's front entrance and shop and injected stronger design into some of the Gov's publications. This chapter also explores Pamela's experience in relation to the growing culture of individualism and corporatisation, and the increasing focus on public image and profit-making in the NSW Public Service.

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[3] MATRIX (J.B., F. Bradshaw, J. Darke, B. Foo, et. al.) (1984), *Making space: Women and the man-made environment*, Pluto Press, Sydney and London.

Historical background: women and the printing industry

Historically, the overwhelming experience of women in the printing industry in developed capitalist economies was that of marginalisation, low pay, union hostility and exclusion from apprenticeships in the 'skilled' printing trades.[4] In explaining this pattern, labour historian Raelene Frances reminds us of the basic division of labour in the printing industry:

> In theory, of course, the division was between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work rather than between males and females. Work classed as 'skilled' was, according to union rules, to be performed exclusively by journeymen or apprentices … Thus, unqualified males were also excluded from skilled work. … The rule operated against females, who were not admitted to apprenticeships.[5]

As explored in Chapter Four, the apprenticeship system was one of the ways in which printing craftsmen restricted access to their trade and reproduced a masculinist culture of craft over generations. In Australia (as well as internationally), typographical and bookbinding unions consistently acted to restrict women from entering printing apprenticeships. In the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth, women received significantly lower rates of pay than their male counterparts. Employers favoured unskilled 'girl' labour because it was cheap, so much so that the employment of women in labour-intensive roles was sometimes preferred to investing in faster, new machinery.[6]

Cynthia Cockburn has observed that the hostility of printing unions towards the presence of women in their trades cannot be explained simply in terms of fear that the women's low wages would bring the tradesmen's rates of pay down:

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[4] C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, p. 151; A. Baron (1989), 'Questions of gender: Deskilling and demasculinization in the U.S. printing industry 1830–1915', *Gender & History*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 178–99.

[5] R. Frances (1993), *The politics of work: Gender and labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne, p. 63.

[6] ibid., p. 61.

> The aggressiveness of craftsmen and their unions towards women as potential rivals for work is often represented in union history … as an unfortunate but inevitable by-product of men's class struggle with the employer … The conflict cannot be reduced to this single dimension of class, however. Had nothing but class interest been at stake, the men would have fought wholeheartedly for equal pay for women. … As it was, the men and their unions sought to have women removed from the trade.[7]

As Cockburn and Frances both assert, women's presence in the printing industry was perceived by mainstream printing unions as dangerous not merely because it represented the watering down of wages; it also threatened the masculine culture of craft.[8]

In the nineteenth century in Britain and Australia, most of the skilled industrial trades as a whole were closed to women,[9] although there were isolated cases where women began their own printing houses, or campaigned to be properly trained as typesetters and bookbinders. In 1860, Emily Faithful, of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, set up a printing shop in London. One year later she founded the Caledonian Press in Edinburgh, where she arranged for women to be trained as compositors.[10] At that time demarcations separated the composition process into a number of categories; one worker deftly handled the type ('type-snatching') while another worker undertook the page layout and imposition that involved the lifting of heavy pages and formes. This demarcation meant that working in the typesetting trade did not necessarily involve lifting heavy formes; this left typesetters open to the suggestion that their labour was a light or effeminate trade.[11] Faithful's influence in Edinburgh was significant and during a major strike by the unionised male printers in 1872, female typesetters were trained and used by employers.[12] By the end of the nineteenth century there were approximately 750 female

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[7] C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 151.

[8] C. Cockburn *Brothers*, pp. 151–54; R. Frances, *The politics of work,* p. 67.

[9] J. Hagan (1965), 'An incident at The Dawn', *Labour History*, vol. 8, p. 19; G. Patmore (1991), 'Gender and work: Feminist labour historiography and equal pay in Australia', in *Australian labour history*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, p. 167.

[10] J. Hagan, 'An incident at The Dawn', p. 19.

[11] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 67.

[12] J. Hagan, 'An incident at The Dawn', pp. 19–21.

typesetters in Edinburgh, operating in competition with male compositors.[13] By the twentieth century, the demarcation distinctions in composing were condensed so that male craft unions could more easily argue that the work was accessible only to physically capable and indentured men.

In late nineteenth century Australia, women were forbidden to work in factories during the night shift. This usually precluded them from employment in newspaper printeries, which made up the majority of Australia's printing factories.[14] The NSW Typographical Association (NSWTA), the NSW compositors' union, was formed in 1880 and its initial industrial actions were cautious and conservative. However, when the publishers of *Words of Grace* employed four young women as compositors in 1888, the NSWTA's members initiated a strike and the union management successfully negotiated with the *Words of Grace* employers to sack the women.[15] The pattern of NSW printing trade unions actively strategising against female employees was set.

As a result of this resistance to female compositors, women seeking entry into the printing industry sometimes turned to radical feminist and communist groups.[16] Suffragette movements actively sought avenues to have women trained and working as typesetters. In Sydney in 1888, Louisa Lawson (Henry Lawson's mother) set up the progressive journal *The Dawn*, a publication for furthering the interests of women. [Fig. 89] Lawson's plan was to have a publication that was written, typeset and printed by women for women readers.[17] Using the pen-name Dora Falconer, she wrote in her first editorial:

> Every eccentricity of belief, and every variety of bias in mankind allies itself with the printing machine, and gets its singularities bruited about in type, but where is the printing ink champion of mankind's better half?[18]

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13 C. Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 153.

14 R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 60.

15 J. Hagan (1966), *Printers and politics: A history of Australian printing unions 1850–1950*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, p. 74.

16 P. J. Hilden (1986), 'Women and the labour movement in France, 1869–1914', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 829–30.

17 ibid., pp. 19–20.

18 D. Falconer (1888), 'About ourselves', *The Dawn: A journal for Australian women*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1.

THE DAWN.

A Journal for Australian Women.

EDITED BY DORA FALCONER

VOL. I. No. 1. SYDNEY, MAY 15, 1888. PRICE, 3D.

About Ourselves.

"WOMAN is not uncompleted man, but diverse," says Tennyson, and being diverse why should she not have her journal in which her divergent hopes, aims, and opinions may have representation. Every eccentricity of belief, and every variety of bias in mankind allies itself with a printing-machine, and gets its singularities fruited about in type, but where is the printing-ink champion of mankind's better half? There has hitherto been no trumpet through which the concentrated voice of womankind could publish their grievances and their opinions. Men legislate on divorce, on hours of labor, and many another question intimately affecting women, but neither ask nor know the wishes of those whose lives and happiness are most concerned. Many a tale might be told by women, and many a useful hint given, even to the omniscient male, which would materially strengthen and guide the hands of law-makers and benefactors aspiring to be just and generous to weak and unrepresented womankind.

Fig. 89. **Cover of the first issue of *The Dawn*, 1888**, edited by Dora Falconer (Louisa Lawson), typeset by female compositors.

The NSWTA was highly displeased with Lawson's project. Its stated objection was that Lawson paid her female typesetters 25s a week, when the male compositor's weekly salary was around £3.[19] The NSWTA did not acknowledge that Lawson's activity in producing an activist newspaper that was actively critical of the dominant social relations was unlikely ever to generate profits in the same manner that a commercial newspaper could. In other words, in working for *The Dawn*, Lawson's female compositors were working for a publication designed to communicate a progressive social message, not necessarily to turn a profit. This was in contradistinction to the majority of the male compositors, who worked for large newspapers. Nonetheless, Lawson's tactics pushed the unionised compositors to act on the matter of female compositors. In 1890 the NSWTA voted on whether to admit females as members to be paid an equal wage to men. The proposal was defeated by a wide margin, with the women's cause receiving only four votes.[20]

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[19] J. Hagan, 'An incident at The Dawn', p. 21. 1 pound is 20 shillings, so the female typesetters' wage was 41 per cent of the men's in this instance.

[20] ibid.

In 1911 the NSW Printing Trade Women & Girls Union was formed and it obtained its first award rate in 1912. The rate was admittedly disappointing (35s a week, about half of what was paid to a male hand-compositor) and it did little to raise women's wages in the printing industry. It was not until 1916 that women were admitted into the NSWTA and then it was only into a distinct 'women and girls' section demarcated for lowly-paid menial labour.[21] While a few female union organisers existed in Australia at this time, their influence and voting rights were limited, and by 1921 there were only two female trade union officials in Sydney, across all the industries.[22] In addition, the NSWTA's Board of Management reserved the right to exclude women from voting in general ballots.[23]

As a result of this hostility and discrimination, women in the printing industry were disinclined to support their male counterparts in industrial action, as they did not feel the support would be reciprocated if and when they should call for better pay and conditions. Although the twentieth century of course saw the feminist movement grow in strength, the place of women in the printing industry did not shift a great deal until their admission as fully indentured printing apprentices in the mid-1970s.

By 1918, Australia's centralised wage-fixing system had set the working wage for women at 30s a week (regardless of whether or not they had dependants) and at £3 a week for men (again, regardless of whether they truly required a 'breadwinner' wage).[24] Legally, the lowest paid workers in Sydney's factories were teenage girls.[25] For example, in 1918, a 21-year-old female letterpress feeder working at a printery in Sydney might be paid 30s per week, while a 14-year-old female print worker could receive as little as 12s 6d.[26] At this time, very few men took up the call for a rise in the standard minimum wage for women although, notably, the

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[21] ibid. See also J. Hagan, *Printers and politics*, pp. 202–03.

[22] J. Hagan, *Printers and politics*, p. 203.

[23] ibid., p. 205.

[24] P. Spearritt (1975), 'Women in Sydney factories c. 1920–50', in A. Curthoys, S. Eade & P. Spearritt (eds), *Women at work*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, pp. 31–32.

[25] Although it is possible that employers hiring Aboriginal people, migrants, and children, might have paid their workers at lower rates.

[26] P. Spearritt, 'Women in Sydney factories', pp. 31–33.

socialist William Lane argued that unionists were wrong to assume that women were content with low wages. He reasoned that if the unions wanted to call for equal pay for women print workers, they would likely find large and energetic industrial support from female factory workers as a whole. Lane's arguments were regarded as dangerously radical and were unheeded by Australian and international compositors' unions.[27]

As we have seen, merely gaining entry into composing was a difficult battle for women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bookbinding was another matter, as this was a field of work that already employed large numbers of women. Frances has undertaken detailed analysis of the labour process and demarcation distinctions for men and women in the Australian bookbinding trade, particularly in Victoria.[28] By the 1880s and 1890s, women were commonly employed as menial labour in bookbinding and stationery manufacture. As Frances has emphasised, while technological changes in composing machinery were minimal between the 1890s and 1930s, this was not the case in bookbinding. As demand for books and printed matter increased between the 1880s and 1930s, a large number of binding and finishing machines were introduced into the printing industry and the rate of production increased. There were new machines for gluing, stapling, stitching, folding, collating, numbering, case-making and cutting. This meant that 'machine-feeders' were increasingly required by printing employers,[29] and the cheapest machine feeders that employers could legally hire were young women.

In the late nineteenth century wage inequity in bookbinding existed starkly along gender lines. The distinction in this particular trade between 'skilled' (male) and 'unskilled' (female) work was arbitrary; it was merely a social construction brought about through arbitration between employers, bookbinders' unions and industrial judges.[30] As Frances argues, this demarcation division between the kind of bookbinding work that was considered 'skilled' and the kind of

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[27] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 66.

[28] See R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', pp. 17–29; Frances, *The politics of work;* R. Frances, L. Kealey & J. Sangster (1996), 'Women and wage labour in Australia and Canada, 1880–1980', *Labour History*, vol. 71, pp. 54–89.

[29] R. Frances, 'Marginal matters', pp. 18–19; J. Hagan, *Printers and politics,* p. 204.

[30] R. Frances, *The politics of work,* pp. 59-61. For a detailed analysis of the different definitions of labour 'skill', see J. Shields (1995), 'Deskilling revisited: Continuity and change in craft work and apprenticeship in late nineteenth century New South Wales', *Labour History*, vol. 68, pp. 1–29.

work that untrained labourers could do was frequently redrawn; employers would attempt to hire more low-paid women to do the work of the higher-paid 'skilled' bookbinders, and the bookbinders' unions would resist this push. Generally, men undertook the backing, covering and finishing and guillotining, while women were more commonly employed for collating, sewing, folding, counting, wrapping and using the stitching machines. Sometimes women were permitted to use bookbinding machinery, at other times the demarcation line was drawn so that only indentured bookbinders could work the machinery. Similarly, at times women were permitted to make leather blotting pads and bind quarter-bound books, at other times this work was reserved for the (male) indentured bookbinders.[31]

It is here that the fraught relationship between machinery, products and the distribution of labourers' bodies is most stark and contentious. Access to machinery meant very different things to different groups. To employers, it meant speeding up production. For craftsmen, machines represented jobs (or the potential loss thereof); but machines were also grasped as things that needed to be mastered and to be claimed squarely as part of the skilled workers' domain. For women, while machinery was associated with the drudgery of low-paid work, the challenge of mastering machinery represented an opportunity to prove their worth as workers with skills and capacities equal to the tradesmen.

While female bookbinders had no formal union representation in the nineteenth century, by the first half of the twentieth century they were included in the Printing Industries Employees Union of Australia (PIEUA).[32] The union, however, treated their concerns differently from those of the men.[33] The concerns and interests of female members were often not made a priority and the 'male unionist continued to think of the union as a male affair'.[34] This experience is

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[31] R. Frances, *The politics of work*, p. 60.

[32] The PIEUA was the result of a union amalgamation in 1917. In 1966 the PIEUA changed its name to the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (PKIU). In 1995 the PKIU merged with the Automotive Food Metals and Engineering Union. They formed the Automotive Food Metals Engineering Printing & Kindred Industries Union. Being an unworkably long title, this union is now known as the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU).

[33] R. Frances, *The politics of work,* p. 170.

[34] ibid., p. 171.

echoed in other major industries in Sydney, such as clothing and textiles and food and drink.[35] In 1927, the Sydney-based Militant Women's Group attempted to challenge women's treatment in factories, particularly in terms of wages and conditions, and a decade later the Council of Action for Equal Pay was formed. By the outbreak of World War II, the emphasis had shifted to the Manpower movement, and working women were placed in 'essential' positions, such as in munitions factories. This experience of working in traditionally male jobs increased women's collective confidence when it came to (and justification for) making claims about competence and equality. As Hagan argues, women 'increasingly resented their union's failure to pay as much attention to their affairs as it did to those of its male majority'.[36]

The history of women and the printing industry should not be interpreted solely as a story about passive victims of patriarchal bias and employer manipulation. As this historical background suggests, women have always been active in attempting to improve their working conditions and status. At times this involved working with unions, while at other times it necessitated separation from men's industrial strongholds. As the twentieth century progressed, women working in Sydney factories were increasingly unionised, sometimes striking without the permission of the (almost exclusively male) union officials.[37]

As this history indicates, deeply entrenched practices and concerns about defending craft strongholds shaped the way in which men reacted to women's presence in the printing industry. Bringing women into the printing industry on equal terms with men was never going to be achieved simply by progressive policy change in the mid-1970s. Before looking to female apprentices and managers in the 1970s and 1980s, it is important to describe the work of the women who preceded them. The following section considers the experiences of mid-career women at the Gov whose employment began in the mid-twentieth century under inequitable employment conditions, and who continued to work in traditional 'women's' roles.

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35 P. Spearritt, 'Women in Sydney factories', pp. 41–43,

36 J. Hagan, 'Craft power', p. 162.

37 P. Spearritt, 'Women in Sydney factories', p. 45.

Fig. 90 **Lithographic section, first floor, no date.** Photograph courtesy of Ray Utick, reproduced with permission. Alan Leishman is pictured on the right, in the white shirt. The printing term 'table-hands' is demonstrated literally here.

Women doing 'women's work'

There were a number of older women who had been employed at the Gov in the 1950s and 1960s, and who by the late 1970s and 1980s were much-loved members of the Gov's community. Their names emerged more often in oral history interviews than those of any other women: the matron, Sister Marjorie West, and the letterpress machine-feeder, Gita Hromadka.

Of course, some women left the Gov once they married or became pregnant, as was the case with the readers' assistant, Win Morehouse. Win started at the Gov in 1963, obtaining the position in part because her sister also worked there. Win was given a reading test and passed, and for the next 14 years she worked as a readers' assistant in the Reading Room on the fourth floor. During that time, Win met and married her husband, Phillip Morehouse, who was also a readers' assistant. By the mid-1970s, Win was the Chief Reader's assistant, and her job was busy

running 'hither and yon', taking proofs and corrections between the reading room and other parts of the Gov.[38] Win left the Gov in late 1976 or early 1977 after she and Phillip had married and she was pregnant with their first child. The following passage is from my interview with Phillip and Win in 2011.

> *Jesse: What year did you leave?*
>
> Win: '76? <looks at Phillip> Early 1977.
>
> *Jesse: And you left because <silence> you had a baby?*
>
> Win: Yep, yep. I was a kept woman after that. Still am. <laughs>
>
> *Jesse: And you didn't want to come back later?*
>
> Win: Nah, nah, didn't want to come back.
>
> **Phillip: I would rather have her stay home, to look after the <pause>**
>
> **so, I never regretted that.**[39]

This particular oral history interview was challenging to undertake, partly because in our phone calls before the interview, Phillip had not mentioned that his wife had also worked at the Gov. When I arrived at the Ultimo Community Centre to conduct the interview with Phillip, he introduced me to Win and explained that she had worked there too. Interviews with couples can sometimes be difficult, as they can finish each other's sentences and stop each other speaking, but such interviews can also be telling in terms of gender dynamics and oft-stated rationales for life decisions. In some respects, Win's story of leaving work to have children is a common one, but it should be remembered that by the mid-1970s there was no requirement for women to leave work once they married. Another 'traditional' path for women's work at the Gov was to stay long-term, in one position.

The following quotes indicate how tradesmen spoke about women in traditional assistant roles. Manager Alan Leishman recalled:

> A lot of women worked there. A lot of the table-hands were women,
>
> and [in] the photographic press room there were women working there.

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[38] Win Morehouse, interview with author, 21 October 2011.

[39] Win Morehouse and Phillip Morehouse, interview with author, 21 October 2011.

> Table-hands, readers' assistants. There was always a lot of women worked in the Government Printing Office, so it wasn't one of those places that was a male abode. Down in the despatch section, there was a lot of women who worked down there, the revenue section. A lot of women in the revenue section, doing checking and things like that.[40]

Letterpress-machinist Victor Gunther explained the work process for one of the well-known elderly machine-feeders, Nancy Bell:

> We had ladies workin' with us. Table-hands and feeders. There was Nancy Bell, a lady, she was a feeder. They used to feed the machines. You'd get a ream of paper and you'd fan it out <demonstrates> and the lady would sit there, that's the machine, and she'd pick that sheet up and she'd feed it into the machine, and it'd take it round and print it and bring it out the other side. And she'd sit there and do that all day.[41]

Fig. 91 **Men and women working in the Revenue Room, railway ticket section, c. late 1960s**, with table-hand Marge Detman, Clarrie Paykes, David Merritt and others. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

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[40] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[41] Victor Gunther, interview with author, 15 August 2012.

In printing (as in other industries), women's work could be very repetitive, but the managers did not always recognise the value that particular labour processes had for some of the female workers. Alan Leishman recalled:

> I got into serious trouble with the ladies from the Revenue section when State Lotteries changed over to their electronic ticketing. I had taken their job away from them. And that's how they looked at it. They had sat there for years with bunches of lottery tickets going <turns pages> '61, 62, 63, 64, 65,' all day, checking lottery numbers … They had a lot pride in that, and that was the only thing they knew. And they saw their life disappearing in front of them.[42]

While Alan's comment does suggest some awareness of the impact of technological change on these women, the statement also confirms the widespread social assumption that boring work was appropriate for them. As these two quotes indicate, the men sometimes professed a sense of amazement that the women would happily sit and undertake a mundane task all day. This amazement suggests: 'Are these women so simple-minded that they don't object to this work? We wouldn't put up with that.' However, as the historical background explains, women in this industry were not always well represented by their unions compared to the men, and they often had no choice but to accept these menial, repetitive jobs. Their exclusion from skilled jobs in the printing industry made them particularly vulnerable to technological change.

Another long-term employment path for women at the Gov was in nursing. Sister Marjorie West (affectionately known as Marge) was the Gov's Matron. [Fig. 92] She began her employment at the Gov in 1958. Prior to that, she had worked as a nurse on active military service in London and New Guinea.[43] Marge's sickbay was on the second floor, between the bindery and the finishing department.

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[42] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[43] D.B.R. (1979), 'That's our matron', *Staff News,* NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, December, p. 7.

Fig. 92 **Marjorie West, 1979**. Photograph from *Staff News*, December 1979.

The workers' memories of Marge are generally positive and they suggest that Marge's sickbay offered some respite if the work became too hard (or if the extra-curricular Public Service sports got a bit rough). Marge's sickbay operated slightly outside of the dominant labour order in place at the Gov. The sickbay was Marge's realm and it operated under her rules. Former paper-ruler Phil Rhoden reminisced:

> Phil: 'Cos you know, we had our own little nurse there, and you know, somewhere to go if you wanted to run and hide, so
>
> *Jesse: Marge West.*
>
> Phil: Yeah! Yeah! That's right.
>
> *Jesse: Yeah, everyone has mentioned Marge West to me.*
>
> Phil: She was lovely. Yeah. You could go to the little room and lie down for a while when things got a bit tough. <laughs> Especially after we'd play footy or something at the Domain, you'd come in the next day – you'd be that stiff and sore – you'd just go up and see Marge, that's right, yeah. So she'd give you a couple of pills and suggest you lie down for a few hours.[44]

Here, Phil offers an example of a woman actively engaged in removing workers from productive labour. That said, Marge did not take well to workers 'swinging the lead' (faking illness).[45]

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[44] Phil Rhoden, interview with author, 27 February 2013.

[45] D.B.R., op. cit., p. 7.

Government Printer Don West did not object to Marjorie West's presence and suggested that she actually made the Gov a more efficient place.[46] In his view, Marge's provision of health care helped prevent absenteeism.

> We had a nursing sister in the place called Marge West. Did you ever meet Marjorie West? She was a gem. She had a system where she used to encourage people to come to work – it didn't matter what was wrong with them – to let her have a look at them. And the number of people that were crook, and came to work just to see Marge, was unbelievable. As a result, absenteeism through sickness was almost nil. You might say it's subversive but it wasn't my system! It was her system, you know? She was there before I was. It really worked. And she was always involved. She was a great looker-afterer of people. It didn't matter what it was. She used to visit people at home.[47]

In the western-facing letterpress section, when the afternoon sun hit the windows, the press-machinists suffered in hot conditions, as did the compositors in the Monotype room. Press-machinist Ray Utick remembered:

> Ray: … the sun just streamed in of an afternoon.
> *Jesse: Did that get hot?*
> Ray: *Very* hot. … But the nurse that used to be there, Marge West, used to go around with salt tablets, because we were sweating that much. Make sure you keep your salt up, yeah.[48]

Marge's position as an older woman in a traditionally accepted 'women's role', a nursing sister, meant that she was not a threat to the male culture at the Gov. She was a necessary supporter of their physical labour and in that sense she was never in opposition to the status quo.

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[46] No relation.

[47] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

[48] Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

With the post-war arrival of European migrants, the Gov employed men and women from all over Europe, often in positions not requiring apprenticeships. Gita Hromadka came from Czechoslovakia and she began working at the Gov in 1951 as an assistant and machine-feeder in the letterpress section.[49] She also managed the staff library and her husband worked in the letterpress area as an offsider.[50]

While women's amenities at the Gov were limited in the mid-twentieth century, by the 1970s there was a women's bathroom on the northern end of the third floor. In about 1974, Gita noticed the particular environmental qualities of this space. It offered a northern aspect, bright, filtered light and ready provision of water. She began to bring in pot-plants and cuttings.[51] By 1979 the women's bathroom was comprehensively filled with pot plants, hanging vines and creepers [Figs 93–94] and Gita was distributing and caring for plants throughout other parts of the Gov, from the ground-floor foyer up to the canteen on the fifth floor.[52] What Gita was doing was not only creative, it was a clever and responsive engagement with the spatial and environmental conditions of her workplace. In transforming a space, Gita was able to create a place that offered respite from the male-dominated domain of the Main Pressroom.

The press-machinist Anna Lyons described Gita's plant-filled bathroom as a refuge:

> *Jesse: Were those plants still in the women's bathrooms?*
> Anna: Oh ... they were great. That older lady that did that, she was the one that was kind of <pause> like a printer but not. She was lovely. It was actually a little bit of a sanctuary, in a way. It was the only space you had. I remember, when I first started [on the first floor], they didn't even have female toilets where I worked, you had to go upstairs.[53]

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[49] 'Vale Gita Hromadka' (1985), *The Graphic*, NSW Government Printing Office Staff Journal, December, p. 12.

[50] 'Staff library' (1977) *Staff News*, NSW Government Printing Office Staff Journal, June, p. 2.

[51] P. Parsons (1979), 'A hanging garden in the shower room', *Staff News,* NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, August, p. 5.

[52] 'Vale Gita Hromadka', p. 5.

[53] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

Fig. 93 **Gita Hromadka and Lillian Taylor, 1979**, in the third floor women's bathroom. Photograph by Jackie Kitney, for *Staff News*, August 1979. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 02728.

As American labour historian Stephen Meyer has noted, the industrial context of the 'rest room' or bathroom has long 'served as a sanctuary from the inhuman rhythms of factory production'.[54] When Anna faced difficulties being accepted as one of the few female press-machinists, Gita offered her support. Anna recounts:

> Because she was quite forward in her way of thinking too, because she knew that I was having a few problems, and I said to her ...
> 'Oh, so-and-so said', <pause> I didn't tell too much to her, because her husband was sometimes my offsider. But I never really revealed much to them. But I says,
> 'Oh, I'm having a bit of trouble with – whoever,' and she says,
> 'Don't you listen! Don't you let them! Just snub your nose at him!'

[54] S. Meyer (2001), 'Work, play, and power: Masculine culture on the automotive shop floor, 1930–1960', in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys? Masculinity, technology and class in America*, Routledge, New York and London, p. 19.

> All those things like this. The way she just gave me a little bit more support, in a way. And because she was so much older, she was already in her fifties, or something, they never bothered her.[55]

Anna's experience is recounted in more detail in the following chapter. Because Gita was an assistant in the letterpress section and she had not openly and publicly challenged the existing status-quo, her presence was more or less accepted by the male printers, some of whom were quietly interested in the secret plant-filled space of the women's bathrooms.

Fig. 94 **Lillian Taylor and Gita Hromadka, 1979,** in the third floor women's bathroom. Photograph by Jackie Kitney. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 02733.

[55] ibid.

Press-machinist Ray Utick described a moment when the Letterpress Overseer, a man known as 'Black Mac' (Alex McLachlan), had asked Ray if he'd accompany him, sneaking in to see the plants. Ray said:

> Gita. She decorated the women's toilet, shower area. And there was plants hanging down from the top of everywhere, it was beautiful in there. The reason I know it was nice: Black Mac come to me one overtime, when there was no women working. He said,
> 'Ray, I wanna go in there and check up on something, will you come with me?' He didn't want to go by himself because there might'a been someone there from a different floor, you know? <laughs> … There used to be all these vines, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon type-a-thing.[56]

Later he elaborated:

> Ray: She was a lovely person. She was Czech. … and her husband. The husband was working in the litho room as an assistant, on the machines. But Gita was, would help anyone. … But what was the name <pause> Hamma?
> *Jesse: Hromadka?*
> Ray: Hamma, something like that. Yeah, something like that. They lived out at Parramatta Road, near Leichhardt, above a shop, type-a-thing. But as I said, she would help anyone. She was a lunch girl, as well. As well as feeding the machine, to help people. The hand-fed machines. But no, she used to do anything for anyone.[57]

Press-machinist Glenn MacKellar did not have to sneak in. He spoke of being invited in to see the plants:

> Occasionally you got invited in there to have a look at the plants. That was a big women's toilet and change-room, but there was only four

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[56] Ray Utick, interview with author, 13 November 2012.

[57] ibid.

> women on the whole floor. And those two women in those photographs, the elderly looking one is Gita, she was a Hungarian refugee, I think, and she used to hand feed – we had a hand-fed printing machine – and somebody would set it up for her. She used to hand-feed envelopes, or whatever it was, through it. She also used to do the morning tea run. I should call her a table-hand, really.[58]

Linotype operator Bob Law remembered one night when a group of men were 'brave' enough to sneak in to see the women's bathroom:

> Ah! You know, when I was thinking, I was thinking the other day about you coming up here today [to do the interview], and I thought, 'I wonder if she'll ask me about the plants in the ladies' toilets?' … these plants in the ladies' toilets; everyone knew about them, but none of the guys were game enough to go in there. But we all braved it one night and went in and it was a sight to behold! There was climbing plants all over the tops of the cubicles, and on the washbasins they were hanging down to the floor, it was just like a forest, it was magnificent! <laughs> Yeah, the old ladies toilet, it was unbelievable. People brought them in from home, yeah. It was part of the social aura of the place, that was in the early days. It was just the way everyone looked after it, you know? … All that sort of thing was happening, you know, the ladies toilets, all decked out. But it did die. But it was part of their day's work. They'd go in and spend the first two hours watering their plants. <laughs>[59]

Bob's recollections indicate that other staff members also joined in, collectively producing a radically different environment in the women's toilets. Gita's production of a space – and her triggering of collective activity to improve and develop the physical environment of the workplace – were ultimately accepted into the culture of the Gov, rather than resisted as eccentric or militant women's activity.

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[58] Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011.

[59] Bob Law, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

I was pleased to find that there were still a few secrets. Not all employees at the Gov knew about the plant-filled women's bathrooms. Alan Leishman, who worked at the Gov in a variety of trade and managerial positions from 1955 to 1989, was surprised to see the photograph of Gita and Lillian Taylor with their hanging garden.

> Alan: Indoor plants in the toilets?
>
> *Jesse: … Did you know about this?*
>
> Alan: No, I didn't. <laughs>[60]

Fig. 95 **The Main Pressroom, 1979**. Gita Hromadka is in the centre in a light blouse. Most other women pictured were machine-feeders and assistants, although female press-machinists had just commenced as apprentices at the Government Printing Office at this time. Photograph courtesy of Glenn MacKellar (pictured fourth from right, top row). To Glenn's right is the Overseer of the Main Pressroom, Bill Murphy.

[60] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

Labour historian Lucy Taksa's analysis of the Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney offers a useful parallel to the Gov in relation to workers' active roles in shaping the uses and meanings of their work environment.[61] As noted in the Introduction, Taksa emphasises that material artefacts, architecture and social stories should always be examined in relation to one another, not in isolation. In criticising the heritage strategy now employed at Eveleigh (at the Technology Park and Carriageworks), Taksa points out the interconnected 'relationship between the site's material culture, its workforce, and the social fabric of everyday life'.[62] She charts the spatial character of worker's resistance at the Eveleigh Railway workshops, explaining how certain spaces and carriages were reappropriated for union meetings, games and socialising. She sees these strategies as 'spatial struggles of resistance' and explains that they were by their very nature temporary and discontinuous, depending upon the ability of management to control and regulate workspaces.[63]

The worker-led creation of plant-filled space at the Gov is an active response to the conditions of production. As a response to the male-dominated culture of the third floor, such a space encouraged collective practices, with a number of workers joining in the project. These activities took place in worktime and thus appropriated time for the worker's own ends, not for the employer's. However, as Taksa suggests, by their very nature such spaces of quiet resistance are ephemeral. By 1985 Gita had passed away and her plants were past their heyday.

Sandra Elizabeth Stringer's recollections of the plants in the bathrooms differed from other interviewees. By the mid-1980s, when she was commencing as an apprentice in graphic reproduction at the Gov, the plants were not as lush or numerous as in earlier years.

> *Jesse: Did the third floor, at that time, have all the plants?*
>
> *In the women's bathroom?*
>
> Sandra: Yes, but <pause> not to the extent in the photo.

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[61] L. Taksa (2005), 'The material culture of an industrial artifact: Interpreting control, defiance, and the everyday', *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 8–27.

[62] ibid., pp. 8–9.

[63] ibid., p. 17.

Jesse: Oh ok. <laughs> Plants don't last forever.

Sandra: No. They had plants, but they didn't have all the climbers,

I don't remember that.[64]

In the mid- to late 1980s, Sandra's experience of women's spaces at the Gov was not expressed in terms of a sanctuary or privacy:

> The guys, they used to, like, even though we had our own space, the guys sometimes would just sorta violate that. Like, if you were on night shift, you know, and there weren't women around, they'd just go and trash things. Your lockers'd sorta be vandalised, yeah. It was really, yeah, it was a strange situation. Sort of, as a woman, as far as the locker spaces went. <pause> You just had to be happy to share your locker sometimes. One between three, you know <laughs> but that wasn't necessarily bad planning, I think it was just that things evolved and they had to accommodate it as it was evolving. So, yeah. Because it would've been silly to sort of, you know, put in dedicated toilets and things on one floor, for two people, you know. So, as it grew. But you did end up with, you know, like, there were a lot more women than two people.[65]

While Sandra is forgiving of the Gov's lack of amenities for women (such as lockers and showers), what this quote indicates is that, notwithstanding the arrival of female apprentices, the women faced challenges additional to those of gaining entry into what had been an exclusively men's trade. The spatial and physical arrangements that they dealt with were subtle (and occasionally overt) indicators of their marginal status. The following section engages with a very different type of female worker at the Gov; a senior manager appointed in the mid-1980s. Despite the differences in the experiences of the two women who are the main focus of this chapter, what they have in common is the creative (re)making of space at the Gov, the active responsibility for transforming specific parts of the Gov, albeit in very different ways, so that they may seem less like a men's factory.

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[64] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[65] ibid.

Fig. 96 **Sid Hampson and Bill Bright, no date,** men who began their careers as printing apprentices and moved up the management chain into senior positions, a pathway that was not open to women prior to the 1980s. Sid Hampson became the Queensland Government Printer. Photograph by John Cusack, reproduced with permission.

A senior manager's experience

Traditionally, the process for becoming a senior manager at the Gov had been an incremental one. Apprentices who served their full indenture became tradesmen; a few tradesmen advanced to leading hands, some of those leading hands advanced to become foremen and overseers. Only a few were eventually appointed to the 'God Floor', the fifth-floor management area. Indeed, this was the journey taken by the third Government Printer VCN Blight and his right-hand man, Bill Bright. [Fig. 96] In the 1970s this traditional promotional path was replaced by a more strategic approach under Don West.

When Don West was appointed NSW Government Printer in 1973, he began a slow restructuring of the senior executive staff. He appointed managers from outside the printing industry who had experience in computing, business and marketing. In the mid-1980s, under pressure to make the Gov more profitable, he created a marketing division, advertised for a Chief of Division – Marketing, and in 1986, Pamela Pearce got the job, the first woman to be appointed to a senior executive role at the Gov.

The appointment of women to senior and executive management roles is one of the most obvious ways that an organisation can publicly demonstrate that it is meeting its equal employment opportunity (EEO) targets. However, this approach can have the effect of leaving those appointed open to the charge that they were selected not on merit, but only as a token gesture. In her work on gender and workplace dynamics in NSW public service work contexts, Raewyn Connell has observed that:

> Where equal employment opportunity is used as a tool of organisational reconstruction, resentment and distrust on one side and exasperation and anger on the other may develop along gender lines.'[66]

The resentment and distrust to which Connell refers can be reflected and reproduced both within the physical environment and in subtle workplace practices.

In NSW during the 1980s, the number of women appointed at senior public service levels improved gradually. However, as social scientist Lois Bryson has noted, 'the private sector was increasingly used as a model for public administration'.[67] The increasing focus on technocratic and 'corporate management' in the public service may have unintentionally skewed appointments in men's interest, as technocratic and corporate governance methods can favour more masculine styles of management.[68] This suggests that the women who succeeded during this period often did so not through so-called soft, collective and consultative administration practices, but as tough, self-directed individuals.

Pamela Pearce's appointment as Chief of Division – Marketing was part of Don West's drive to reform the Gov as a modern, rational, profit-making printing establishment. As stated earlier, she was the first and only woman to be appointed to the Gov's senior executive group before the closure in 1989. Unlike the tradesmen interviewed in this research project, Pamela did not have a community or readymade collective identity with which to ally herself. In order to

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66 R.W. Connell, 'Glass ceilings or gendered institutions?', p. 843.

67 ibid., p. 262.

68 L. Bryson (1987), 'Women and management in the public sector', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XLVI, no. 3, pp. 259–60.

survive and flourish, she had carefully cultivated and controlled her career path as a manager and businesswoman. Prior to her arrival at the Gov, Pamela's background was in marketing at the Australian Museum,[69] and she explained during her interview that she had a strategic interest in joining the Gov because it would offer her experience in handling industrial relations in a highly unionised work environment. Pamela spoke frankly about her appointment, describing it as 'a reluctant appointment' by the Gov's management:

> I was told basically that the reason I was given the job was because I was a head and shoulders above other candidates. I don't think they wanted a woman there at all. I think they just interviewed me because my application was such that they couldn't not. And they had to have a committee which had a woman on it. [Pat O'Shane].[70]

Fig. 97 **The senior executive team, 1986.** From left: Alan Fisher, Don West, Stuart Lincolne, Pamela Pearce, unknown. Photographed for the 1986 *Annual Report*. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 44594.

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[69] 'Pamela Pearce' (1986), *The Graphic*, NSW Government Printing Office staff journal, Sydney, August, p. 5.

[70] Pamela Pearce, interview with author, 23 January 2012.

While Pamela acknowledged that she had support from some of her own staff, in general her introduction to the Gov as an executive manager did have its difficulties:

> I think it was an absolute total shock to have somebody who wasn't from a printing background, but I think [what was] more of a concern to people … was that I was a woman. I think it was a very misogynistic environment … the culture was, I was tolerated. That's not totally true. My own people, my own team, people like Alan Leishman and others there who you would think were generally old-style people, were very, very supportive of the changes, and I couldn't have asked for more … But the culture was totally, dominantly male.[71]

In explaining how her seniority sometimes went unrecognised, Pamela describes a simple matter involving office space:

> Alan Fisher was in an office and then Stuart [Lincolne] had an office and then someone else there had a big office, so you had [Government] Printer, the two chiefs and the other guy there. And Don West wouldn't allow me to move into that office, for a *long* time. I actually pushed it because I understood at the time that it was really critical. So I was stuck in this little side office, even though I was Chief of Division.[72]

Pamela recognised that the spatial placement of offices in this hierarchical organisation was not merely a practical matter, it was deeply symbolic, a visual display of authority that was necessary to ensure respect from managers and employees. As with the fiddly insignia that appeared on government publications, Pamela understood that the appearance of authority and power mattered and she fought to have her position recognised spatially.

The very creation of a marketing division points to a transition in the Gov's emphasis away from a government *service,* towards a government agency that (attempted to) produce goods efficiently and rationally for *profit*. To achieve this, the Gov's public image was key, and Pamela recognised

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[71] ibid.

[72] ibid.

the significance of a visual language of self-promotion and corporate identity. This new focus on aesthetics was channelled into interior office and workfloor design, as well as into graphic design, at the Gov. Pamela believed that if the Gov were to present itself as an efficient, competitive, profit-making enterprise, it had to look more like a corporation. This translated into concerns about image and Pamela orchestrated the renovation of the Gov's front entrance, shop and client liaison sections.

From the late 1950s, the Gov's central front entrance on Harris Street had for a long time been an open void, a functional area with a drab desk and security guard. [Fig. 98] Pamela described her reaction to the front entrance:

> The front door onto Harris Street was *terrible* when I first went there.
> It was all totally open. Anyone could walk in. It was really noisy …
> and I was able to address the way we did it, somewhat differently.[73]

Fig. 98 **The ground floor front desk of the Government Printing Office, prior to renovation, 1981**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 14668.

[73] ibid.

Fig. 99 **Renovations to the front entrance and foyer, 1986.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 44277.

Fig. 100 **The new Government Printing Office front door, 1986.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 31322.

Fig. 101. **The renovated Government Printing Office front lobby, with an early headstone from the GPO building at Phillip and Bent streets, 1986.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 31313.

Under Pamela's direction, the Gov's front entrance was renovated to include glass doors, glass bricks and a wall-sized mural displaying an historical photograph. [Fig. 5] Pamela explained:

> So, if you can imagine, you walked into the front foyer, it was always full of dust and dirt and leaves from Harris Street, because it didn't have a door. We put in glass doors; that stopped a lot of that. We put that mural in the foyer, before that it was just paint, I don't know, some awful colour, just painted … It was a dreary, dark, a miserable place to be, really.[74]

Pamela was orienting the Gov to clients and consumers. Her strategies were directed outwards, rather than looking inwards into the internal politics at the Gov. She undertook the same strategies in renovating the Gov's small bookshop. [Fig. 102] In the original building, the space adjacent to the front entrance was a small sales area, a place where the general public could buy government-issued publications and legislation. The staff recall the space as 'cramped and dark', 'really just an extension of our warehouse'.[75]

Fig. 102 **The renovated Government Printing Office shop, 1986.** Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 4 – 44606.

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[74] ibid.

[75] 'New look sales centre' (1986), *The Graphic*, NSW Government Printing Office staff journal, Sydney, August, p. 3.

In what must have seemed an extravagance to more traditional printing managers, Pamela arranged for a refit of the shop, hiring architect Gavin Hughes to transform the shop's interior, making it 'bright, airy, and much larger'.[76] The 1985–1986 *Annual Report* boasts that shop sales were immediately boosted by 30 per cent.[77]

Another strategy employed by Pamela was to make greater use of the human resources already available at the Gov, what she saw as the undervalued design skills that many of the staff possessed.

> Well, I was a marketer. I mean, they brought me in because I was a marketer. And also you're in an environment where you can print anything … I was also trying to change the culture a bit. So we did a special competition for a modest prize: 'How are your design skills?' We had designers in the place. The other reason I would have done that – knowing the way I work – is that it is also a culture-breaker … That worked quite well. There are many ways of getting around cultural challenges, you know.[78]

Pamela arranged a competition to redesign the simple little publication, *Legislation Issued,* a government document that up to that point had not been interpreted in visual terms. It is easy to see how Pamela's decisions here were highly strategic; she consciously set out to transform the traditional culture and practices at the Gov. Changing those practices involved design transformations and recognising the creative and enterprising skills that many of the staff possessed.

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[76] ibid., p. 3.

[77] NSW Government Printing Office (1986), *Annual Report 1985-86*, NSW Government, Sydney, p. 4.

[78] Pamela Pearce, interview with author, 23 January 2012.

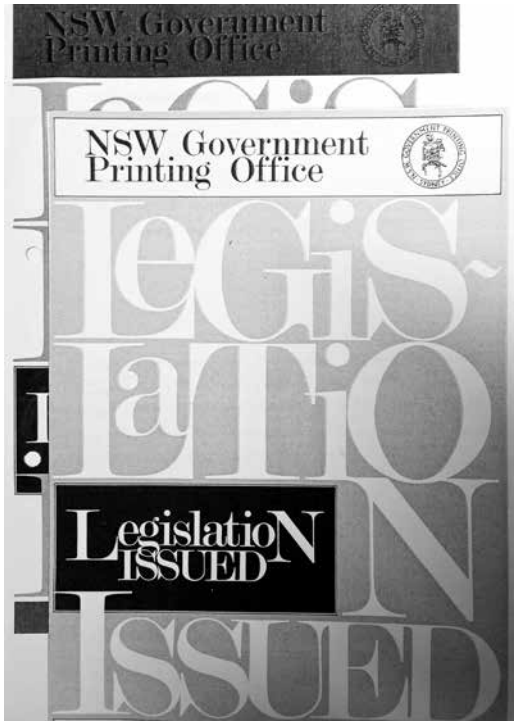

Fig. 103 **The redesigned cover of *Legislation Issued***, one of the design competitions led by Pamela Pearce, late 1980s.

Being what Pamela calls a 'culture-breaker' took its toll and she chose to leave the Gov after two and a half years. She reflected:

> The culture was challenging and two and a half years was enough, it was very debilitating. But it was fabulous in terms of what was able to be achieved, the way I was able to free up some good people and get rid of some really dead wood. And the changes that we could make, and the grounding that I received in really serious industrial relations stood me in good stead for many years … The reason I only stayed two and a half years was that the whole culture was so oppressive, depressing and hidebound, that even though Stuart [Lincolne] and I (he in the Operations, and me in Marketing) were able to drive a lot of reform, it just wore you down, day after day. It was a very depressing environment in that sense.[79]

[79] ibid.

While a refitted sales centre, foyer and a redesigned *Legislation Issued* cover might seem minor or mundane contributions to industrial history, what they represent is the significant and symbolic role of material culture and space in the changing value system of an organisation. Pamela's design changes visually and physically performed the shift from a service-oriented and collective craft institution towards a profit-driven and client-focused enterprise. The Gov never quite achieved the latter, being closed down before the transformation could fully take place.

The two main examples given in this chapter of women's experiences at the Gov are at opposing ends of the spectrum. Gita Hromadka and Pamela Pearce came from dramatically different social, economic and educational contexts. They do, however, have something in common. Their active transformations of space at the Gov demonstrate how these women strategically made a *place* for themselves in a male-dominated printing environment. Industrial spaces are not static and bound by maps and diagrams; they are social and are continually contested.[80] Subtle 'spatial practices of resistance' can be uncovered through oral histories and archival photographs, allowing us to see the social and gendered complexity that may be negotiated through the simple placement of a few plants or the renovation of a public building's foyer. The combination of these stories also reminds us of the broader societal and political transition bubbling away at the Gov: the move away from collective, voluntary, community activity (as exemplified by Gita's plants) towards more individually-driven and profit-focused strategies in the 1980s. In the mid-1970s and 1980s the Gov admitted an increasing number of female apprentices in non-traditional printing trades. The following chapter considers their experience, balancing the workplace rhetoric against evidence of actual embodied practices.

[80] L. Taksa, 'The material culture of an industrial artefact', p. 18.

8. 'You work out ways': the politics of lifting & other challenges faced by female printing apprentices

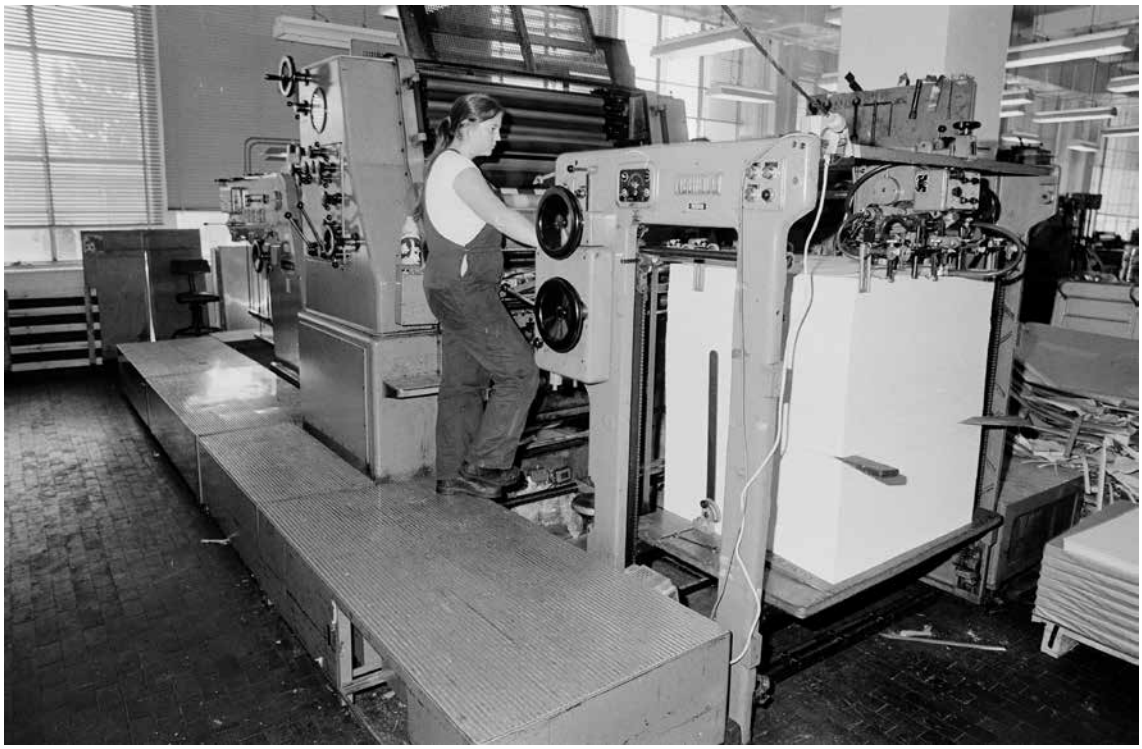

Fig. 104 **One of the first female press-machinists at the Government Printing Office, 1981**. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 14659.

Introduction

One of the compelling things about the Gov is that it was a contradictory context for women's employment. On the one hand it was a male-dominated factory and on the other it was a progressive experiment in training women in non-traditional printing trades. Like other printing establishments during this period in Australia, the Gov inherited the sexist prejudices and practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, this was an industry with a history of restricting women's access to skilled printing trades, lest their presence dilute the strength of male craft unionism.[1] Not only did traditional prejudices shape workplace practices but as new technologies were introduced, different and emergent divisions of labour were generated, sometimes along gender lines.[2] Workplace processes were constantly in flux.

Historically, the patriarchal and masculinist culture of the printing industry excluded women on a number of grounds, bolstered particularly by claims that the work was too heavy, dirty, dangerous, complex and 'skilled' for women to handle.[3] However, as the previous chapter outlined, it is important to remember that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries women were very present in the printing industry, albeit as low-paid table-hands, machine feeders, collators and readers' assistants.[4] Women were also present in the production of copy, as typists. The challenge for feminists and proponents of equal employment opportunity was to campaign for people to be admitted into *all* spheres of work, regardless of gender (or other points of difference).

At the Gov, the status quo was disrupted in the mid-1970s when management (in agreement with unions) gradually began admitting women into printing apprenticeships on pay equal

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1 C. Cockburn (1983), *Brothers*, *Male dominance and technological change*, Pluto Press, London, pp. 151–90.

2 R.W. Connell (2006), 'Glass ceilings or gendered Institutions? Mapping the gender regimes of public sector worksites', *Public Administration Review*, November, p. 841.

3 A. Game & R. Pringle (1983), *Gender at work*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London & Boston, pp. 28–31.

4 R. Frances, *The politics of work: Gender and labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York & Melbourne; R. Frances (1991), 'Marginal matters: Gender, skill, unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court – A case study of the Australian printing industry 1925–1937', *Labour History*, no. 61, pp. 17–29.

to their male counterparts. This occurred four years before the Gov was legally obliged to admit female apprentices and from 1974, women began to be indentured as apprentices in composition, bookbinding, graphic reproduction and a few years later as press-machinists. By the late 1970s there was no longer any industrial demarcation at the Gov between the type of work carried out by male and female workers.[5]

Those responsible for apprentice recruitment told me how they often preferred hiring 'girls',[6] because they tended to be better presented, more ambitious and hard workers. Compositor Geoff Hawes recalled:

> Once we started taking some girl apprentices, it sort of opened the door. I used to be on, I was promoted to Leading Hand, and part of my job was to interview the prospective first-year apprentices. There was a panel of three of us. And we soon discovered, the girls played the boys off a break. You know? We picked more girls. Not because they were girls, but because they were just so much better to talk to, to interview, scholastically, appearance-wise. Girls would always come in. We had one guy come in, in shorts and thongs, and he had his scrunched up bit of paper, and we thought, yeah right. Ok … But as I said – it's a terrible thing to say – but a lot of the times the girls were just so much better, appearance-wise, scholastically and then on the job as well. Their eye to detail was much better than the boys'. I hate to say it, but it was.[7]

Once these young women were brought into the industry, however, they were not always well supported. There was often a stark contrast between discourse and practice. Anti-discrimination language encouraged female would-be apprentices to apply, and yet their day-to-day experiences

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[5] H. Younie (1979), 'Departmental spokeswoman', *Staff News*, NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, March, p. 5.

[6] The gender-biased language of the time meant that women employees at the Gov were often referred to as 'girls'. In the case of apprentices, this was a more sensible usage, since the women being indentured were often only 15 or 16 years old, and their male counterparts were similarly referred to as 'boys'. The discrepancy shows up more readily in discussions of all women workers at the Gov, where it is apparent that male workers regularly referred to female workers as 'girls', regardless of their age or occupational status.

[7] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

on the shop floor were at times highly problematic. As sociologist Rosslyn Reed has observed, in the Australian printing industry at this time, there remained strong masculine sub-cultures that operated to exclude, discriminate and harass these newly-admitted women. Reed argues that even though the policy and language converted to a discourse of anti-discrimination by the 1980s, entrenched practices and prejudices remained on the shop floor for much longer.[8]

In this chapter, I focus on the trade of press-machining, a male-dominated trade that admitted a small number of women at the Gov. This exemplifies how the issue of heavy lifting was used as justification for press-machining work to be described in the workplace as inappropriate for women. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, the workplace rhetoric surrounding heavy lifting did not reflect the reality of physical, embodied practice. In practice, press-machinists 'worked out ways' to manage the weightiness of their work, regardless of their gender.

Equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination law

During the 1970s and 1980s a number of historic legal changes came into force to improve the status of women. NSW state and federal anti-discrimination legislation[9] and the Apprenticeship Program for Girls offered working-class women entry into the higher paid, traditionally male trades, thereby potentially disrupting the 'male breadwinner' norm that maintained patriarchal hiring systems and supported traditional masculine identities.[10] The *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act* in 1977 prohibited discrimination in employment on the grounds of race, sex and marital

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[8] R. Reed (1994), 'Anti-discrimination language and discriminatory outcomes: Employers' discourse on women in printing and allied trades', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 89–105.

[9] The relevant state and federal legislation is the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW); the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Commonwealth); the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* (Commonwealth); the *Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Act 1987* (Commonwealth). To put this in context with other countries, the USA's *Civil Rights Act 1964* outlawed employment discrimination on the basis of gender, race, and religion, and was later strengthened to include equal employment opportunity measures. In the United Kingdom the *Sex Discrimination Act* was passed in 1975. South Australia was the first Australian state to legislate in this area, passing the *Prohibition of Discrimination Act* in 1966, and the *Sex Discrimination Act* in 1976.

[10] R. Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language', p. 90; P. Wilenski (1977), *Directions for change: Review of New South Wales Government Administration – interim report*, NSW Government, Sydney, p. 179.

status.[11] Other significant transitions included the federal lifting of the marriage bar in 1966[12] and the introduction of equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action requirements in 1977, 1980 and 1981.[13] In 1980 the *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act* was amended to require NSW government departments and statutory authorities to prepare EEO management plans.[14] Despite this, many employment sectors with an ingrained culture of prejudice and an underlying traditional gender regime found reform difficult to bring about. Change in these areas was described by Peter Wilenski as 'so slow as to be almost imperceptible'.[15]

My use of the term 'gender regime' has been appropriated from Connell's analysis of the gender regime in NSW public sector institutions.[16] Her study explores how NSW public sector workplaces followed a trend towards *performed* workplace gender neutrality through the application of anti-discrimination and EEO policy. As she notes, only lip service was paid to gender neutrality, that is, gender neutrality was enacted through policy objectives and written workplace language, but inequitable gender regimes continued to prevail, particularly those that were systematised within particular management styles and job-role identities.[17] Here we are talking about indirect or systematic discrimination, which is the outcome of policies, rules and workplace practices that on the surface appear neutral but in reality leave particular groups at a disadvantage.[18] One example of this is inflexible working hours; another is the demand that women must be 'one of the boys' if they want to be accepted as 'equal'.[19] Weight lifting limits can function as indirect forms of workplace discrimination, as this section will demonstrate.

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[11] H. Ferguson (1981), *Report on the Equal Employment Opportunity Project at the NSW Government Printing Office*, Sydney, NSW Government Printing Office, p. 2.

[12] Until 1966, women working in the Australian Public Service (APS) were required to resign from permanent positions when they married.

[13] Part 9A of the *NSW Anti-Discrimination Act* requires all public sector agencies to implement EEO programs.

[14] NSW Government Printing Office (1987), 'Equal Employment Opportunity Policy', internal document, Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2095, NSW State Records, Sydney.

[15] P. Wilenski, op. cit, p. 180.

[16] R.W. Connell, 'Glass ceilings or gendered institutions?', pp. 837–49.

[17] ibid.

[18] P. Wilenski, op. cit., pp. 180–81.

[19] H. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 9.

Female apprentices at the Government Printing Office

Fig. 105 **Bookbinding apprentice (possibly Janet Rainbow), c. 1974.** Photograph taken for an apprentice recruitment drive. Anecdotal evidence suggests this photograph may be later than 1974 but this is the date ascribed to the image in the State Library's collection. Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 23450.

The first female apprentice at the Gov was Janet Rainbow,[20] recruited in late 1973 for the 1974 round of apprenticeships. Janet was apprenticed in bookbinding and in an interview for the *Sydney Morning Herald* that year she obliquely warned other women who might be interested in the trade:

> [The] only thing is that they must be prepared to be treated just like the boys, which is what I find anyway.[21]

This statement should not be read too literally. In view of the existing research on female apprentice experience in non-traditional trades, it is well established that women were treated

[20] Married name Janet Hutcheson.

[21] J. Rainbow, quoted in 'More girls finding their way into a man's world' (1974), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October, p. 12.

quite differently from their male counterparts, once they entered a heretofore male-dominated occupational area.[22] Put simply, it was tough and female apprentice's actions, intentions and behaviours were under constant scrutiny. Being treated 'like the boys' did not mean equality in practice; the phrase is more likely code that women should expect harassment, bullying and a lack of support.

In the late 1970s and 1980s the Gov was admitting an unusually high number of female apprentices, particularly into composing and bookbinding, [23]and by the late 1970s had also admitted two or three women as press-machinists per year. In 1980, 21 per cent of the Gov's apprentices across all the years were female and in the following year, they represented about 41 per cent (seven) of that year's intake of 17 apprentices.[24] By 1986, women made up 25 per cent of the apprentices hired at the Gov, and a year later, 43 per cent of the total recruits.[25] Reed notes:

> By 1984 women made up 12 per cent of new apprenticeships in Australia but only 2 per cent were in high status male dominated trades such as printing machining.[26]

Female press-machinist apprentices remained a tiny minority; by 1991 they still constituted only 1 to 2 per cent of all press-machinist apprentices[27]

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[22] M. Braundy (2011), *Men, women and tools: Bridging the divide*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax & Winnipeg; C. Cockburn (1983), 'Caught in the wheels: The high cost of being a female cog in the male machinery of engineering', *Marxism Today*, vol. 27, pp. 16–20; D. Deacon (1984), 'The employment of women in the Commonwealth Public Service: The creation and reproduction of the dual labour market', in M. Simms (ed.), *Australian women and the political system*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, pp. 132–50; A. Game & R. Pringle (1983), *Gender at work*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston; S.L. Hacker (1990), *Doing it the hard way: Investigations of gender and technology*, Unwin Hyman, Boston; M. Johnston (1989), *Jobs for the girls*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne; R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones (1993), *Women in printing: Employers' attitudes to women in trades*, Women's Bureau, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

[23] 'Jobs for the girls' (1980), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December, p. 21.

[24] 'Jobs for the girls', p. 21; Ferguson, op. cit., p. 50.

[25] NSW Government Printing Office (1987), *Annual Report 1986–87*, NSW Government, Sydney, p. 16.

[26] R. Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language', p. 91.

[27] ibid.

Fig. 106 **The Government Printing Office netball team was made up mostly of trade apprentices, 1980.** From left to right (spelling may be incorrect for some): Catrina Amato, Kerry Rinkin, Maria Brisbane, Stella Tekstra, Margaret Hinder, Joanne Hill, Christine Stock, Michelle Langley, Vera Bursach, Robyn Carroll, Mary-Anne Cook (Wallace). Copyright of the Crown, reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. SLNSW call no. Government Printing Office 3 – 07231.

It is regrettable that during the oral history period for this research project, I was not able to set up interviews with more tradeswomen who had worked at the Gov.[28] Those I did interview, however, represent three different trades and there are commonalities in their experiences of apprentice training and work at the Gov. This includes a dedication to producing quality work and a strong focus on honing their technical skills so that they could not become targets of criticism. There was a generalised feeling that the male apprentices could make mistakes and get away with sloppy work, but because their positions were not yet accepted, these women felt that their work had to be above reproach.

[28] This is partly explained by the fact that there were simply fewer women than men working at the Gov. Married names also made some of them harder to track down. Additionally, female former employees at the Gov are often still in full-time work, and some did not have the time or the inclination to undertake an oral history interview.

Kim Cooper was apprenticed as a bookbinder in 1977.[29] During her interview, Kim's recollections of the Gov were predominantly positive, recalling the enjoyment she and other apprentices had 'mucking up', playing pranks and roller-skating through central Sydney's Devonshire Tunnel on the way to work. She conceded that being a female apprentice occasionally presented challenges but her solution was simply to apply herself as rigorously as possible.[30] There is pride in Kim's description of 'paving the way' for other women in bookbinding:

> The first one was Janet Hutcheson, she would have been about two years ahead of me … She was the first. I was the second in my year though, then Marianne Cook,[31] she started just after me. Then the following year more girls came into it after that. So we paved the way for the girls. It was quite a big thing. It was great with the guys, because there would have been about 10 apprentices a year … And there were other girls who were compositors as well … But yeah, there would have been about 10 of us. And with the guys that were apprentices, it was heaps fun. You know, they treated us just, normal, you know, not a problem We're all roughly the same age, so we'd all just have fun.[32]

Kim was adamant, however: 'I was treated the same as the guys.'[33] She later contradicted this statement by explaining that although she did experience prejudice, those sentiments were not expressed by all men at the Gov; it was the older men who were more likely to express prejudice:

> The people we had worries with were the old blokes. And they used to say things like,
> 'You should be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen', you know.
> 'You shouldn't be working here', you know, and like – I'm 15! Hang on!
> 'You shouldn't be working here, this is a man's trade', you know. The older blokes had that sort of attitude, and weren't very, you know. You had to

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[29] Maiden name Kim Murphy.

[30] 'Our apprentices win major technical college awards' (1981) *Staff News*, vol. 5, no. 11, December, p. 9.

[31] Married name Marianne Wallace.

[32] Kim Cooper, interview with author, 29 November 2011.

[33] ibid.

> prove that you could do the job. So basically you had to be better to prove you were equal … At first some of the binders, you know, the old blokes, they were really a bit narky. They just sorta didn't believe females could do it. But you'd prove your point, and the females in the main did better than the blokes, because you had to prove a point, I suppose, and you worked harder and you don't mind that. You feel better, and you feel like you've achieved a fair bit.[34]

Kim regularly won prizes for bookbinding, as did her apprentice bookbinding colleagues, Ann Kerr and Rhondda Lyne.[35] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer's account of her apprenticeship experience bears many similarities to Kim's. Sandra recalled creative workplace pranks in immense detail (see the following chapter), and like Kim she recalled roller-skating, this time on the roof of the Gov.

Sandra was apprenticed in Graphic Reproduction in 1984 and she describes her section at the Gov as very friendly, a communal, family-like atmosphere. Sandra acknowledged that the work environment included having to deal with sexism, but was dismissive about the impact of this prejudice on her everyday experience:

> I mean, as a kid I read a book called the *House of sixty fathers*. Well, going to the Government Printing Office was sort of like the *House of the sixty big brothers*. You know, they'd sort of be very protective of you, at times, as well. So, you know, it wasn't as if you were thrown into a culture that was sort of hostile or aggressive towards you. But, certainly, if you came up against a character who had certain sexist attitudes or viewpoints, you had no recourse, or no choice but to just wear it … The things that used to get me, as far as sexism would go is, if Alison wasn't in the office, if she had the day off … it was always a female voice they wanted at the end of the phone … You'd sorta have to drop what you were doing and be the

[34] ibid.

[35] 'Our apprentices win major technical college awards', p. 9.

> one in the office … Like I say, it wasn't hostile. But certainly you'd come up against blokes who'd say stuff to you like,
> 'If you can't handle the heat, get out of the kitchen', you know?
> That kind of thing. And,
> 'You should be barefoot and pregnant', I mean, you know, you just let all that go over … That's where you've gotta look at it in its own historical context, as to what the climate was at the time … Because otherwise you'd be looking at some of their practical jokes and you'd be wanting them hung, drawn and quartered! <laughs>[36]

As with some of the verbal accounts included in Chapter Two, this is an instance where an interview participant positions the narrative about his or her workplace experience as somewhat separate from the official institutional narrative. It was a flawed place, but there is tolerance and affection in Sandra's accounts of the Gov, as well an admission that the institution was somewhat deficient. In partly excusing the men's behaviour, Sandra appears to recognise sexist prejudice as being systematic and institutionalised within a broad range of practices and attitudes, rather than interpreting isolated offences in relation to individual offenders.

Tellingly, Sandra also observed that inequity came to be expressed through physical things. As a spokeswoman at the Gov, one of the issues that she took up with management was the inappropriateness of workplace safety equipment for women:

> By the time I got there they were very good at providing things like protective clothing, and all that sorta thing. But one of our issues was, they couldn't get their head around the fact that women were a lot smaller in size to the males that worked there, so <laughs> often getting things like gloves that'd fit you … I used to have a big problem because the gloves'd be really huge on me, and I'd end up with more stuff inside the gloves than what I would on the outside![37]

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[36] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[37] ibid.

Given Sandra's work involved working with acid and other corrosive chemicals, this light-hearted statement belies potentially serious workplace negligence.

By contrast, Anna Lyons' experience was more challenging. Anna was apprenticed in press-machining in the late 1970s. While bookbinding, composing and graphic reproduction were seen as appropriate for new female apprentices, press-machining remained a masculine stronghold.[38] Anna experienced workplace discrimination, bullying and sexism on a regular basis at the Gov, but she also spoke of the strong friendships she formed with other printers. As explored in Chapter Four, the Main Pressroom at the Gov maintained a tough, patriarchal culture that was resistant to change. Close to the beginning of the interview, I asked Anna about her experience as the only female press-machinist at the Gov.

> Well, it was very difficult <laughs> with me being the only female, as you can imagine. Especially the print room, the print room was very male dominant type and so unionised and never really wanted any changes, I found … But if you say anything, then you really cop it. You cop it on the floor, you see. When you start up your machine, some would whistle with a condescending whistle.[39]

Anna described how her daily work involved enduring 'death stares', unnecessary visits from people in other sections and prank phone-calls involving heavy breathing on the end of the line. She alleged that occasionally some printers deliberately sabotaged the presses she was assigned to, and that some members of management were unsupportive, including taking bets about whether or not she would 'stick it out'. In a similar story to Sandra's, Anna observed that if the Main Pressroom's office assistant was away, she would be asked to take over – a request made because of her gender. In summing up her experience, she said:

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[38] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit.

[39] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012. 'Cop it' is slang for suffering punishment. Note: the participant sometimes spoke of herself as the only female press-machinist, although this was not strictly the case, as there were a small number other female apprentice press-machinists at the Government Printing Office (at times a maximum of three). The may have been many times, however, when she was the only female tradeswoman in a particular section or work area.

> I think at the Government Printing Office, I had worse experiences there … Verbal abuse and intimidation. You walk in there, and it's all blokes, and they look at you, and you know what they're thinking. Just the way that they speak to you, there was a bit of attitude.[40]

Anna's interview is filled with contradictory statements about her experience:

> It was difficult, in a lot of ways. But then I had great times too. Don't get me wrong. Yeah. I'd never do it again though. <laughs> In hindsight **…** No, look, it was good fun. But it was difficult … But <pause> look it was good and it was challenging, and it was all sorts of things. It was hard in those days, yeah. It was so male-dominated.[41]

This seemingly inconsistent position is useful to observe; contradictions are often indicators of where there is tension and unresolved concerns.[42] Anna's position as a press-machinist was never fully accepted into the patriarchal enclave of the Main Pressroom. Yet, in reconstructing this story through memory, she is quick to emphasise positive experiences and does not wish to cast herself as a passive victim of discrimination.

This tension between the results of progressive social policy and the context of a traditional gender division of labour in practice was a contradiction that male workers were also aware of, and they played various roles in relation to female apprentices. In a close reading of the following exchange between two compositors and the author, a discrepancy between language and practice is discernible, and both men are somewhat reflective about the experiences that female apprentices endured. Compositors Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis spoke frankly with me about their attitudes to female apprentices and how they were treated and they offer subtly different positions. Neil is more open to acknowledging value changes over time, while Barry puts the responsibility back on the women to be able to cope.

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[40] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

[41] ibid.

[42] Cockburn, *Brothers*, p. 12.

Jesse: And you had female apprentices really early?

Barry: We did.

Neil: Yeah, yeah. Quite a few years before I started.

Barry: Kim Cooper was one.

Neil: Not a lot, but there were female apprentices.

Barry: There were about three in my year.

Neil: Not in my year, but in the previous year at least two or three.

And some of the tradeswomen had been there for a number of years.

Barry: Obviously phasing it in. It was obviously a government initiative.

Neil: As the years went by, it was almost a 50:50 split of the apprentice intake. Male and female.

Jesse: And that's happening at the same time as the technology is changing?

Neil: Yeah. Which was pretty good, because it went from a physical, dirty, laborious type of job

Barry: Very heavy work

Neil: Yeah, to a clean, not so physical, you know, almost arty type of job.

Jesse: Do you reckon they copped a bit of flak, or was it alright?

Neil: Oh, <pause> yeah. Probably. I wouldn't say 'flak' but

Barry: I think they gave it back!

Neil: You know, you'd probably call it 'sexual harassment' now.

Barry: There was probably a couple of timid ones there, that were <pause>

shy and I think it would offend them.

Neil: A range of people

Barry: But some of them were quite strong personalities, and they'd just cope with it and move on.

Neil: But these days it's not the done thing, for any sexism. <pause>

Oh, some, some didn't mind it. And others sort of got upset and they soon learned, like, 'Oh, I'll leave that one alone', because, like, you know, others didn't mind a joke around. But I think it ... because it was a trade it

> wasn't a normal thing that a lot of women thought of doing, and the girls that started there, and the ones that worked there, they were mentally probably a lot stronger. It's like when a girl goes into a mechanic's trade, which is a traditionally male field, panel beating and things like that.
> *Barry: They'd know what to expect.*
> Neil: And even to this day they'd still get that stigma of being a girl in a man's trade. But it does change. I mean there was quite a few female printers [press-machinists]. And that was a real, you know, 95 per cent male, 5 per cent female sort of spread of the sexes in the trade back then. You know? They were quite <pause> even though they were feminine, they still had a tough side to 'em, to cope with the <pause> just the <pause> I wouldn't say harassment, but the way males were treating women apprentices back then. It was quite an interesting time, over those spread of years, the number of women getting into trade did increase. I think the fact that it went from a heavy, dirty industry to a cleaner environment had a lot to do with it as well.[43]

This passage provides insight into how these workers had an awareness of what the women were experiencing while at the same time acknowledging that they themselves might have contributed to an unequal work situation. Neil makes the more traditional assumption that because composition became 'cleaner' and 'lighter' with new technologies, it was therefore more appropriate for women.[44] This duality between an awareness of sexism and its continuation regardless is regularly present in gender discussions concerning the Gov, and this is indicative of just how deeply entrenched particular practices and beliefs can be. The following section will look in more detail at how the issue of heavy lifting was structured in a similarly contradictory manner; that is, how the workplace discourse surrounding heavy lifting had little to do with the actual physical work in practice.

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[43] Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

[44] A. Game & R. Pringle, *Gender at work*, pp. 28–35.

Weighty matters: workplace rhetoric about heavy lifting

The simple movement of objects in a space can be a deeply political matter. It can become bound up with the identities of men and women and with the collective work culture of an organisation. A bureaucratic and legal emphasis on heavy work produced a contentious politics of lifting at the Gov. This discussion of lifting was often a discussion had by men about women. At the same time as women were entering non-traditional printing trades, the industry was increasingly shifting to offset-lithography, as we have seen in Chapter Four. The change from letterpress printing to lithography had the unrealised potential to transform the patriarchal culture of presswork and unseat the dominant gendering of presses as 'men's machines'. Unlike letterpress, lithography did not involve lifting a heavy letterpress *forme* (frame holding metal type), thereby negating the long-standing argument that women were not strong enough for the work. Nonetheless, the pressroom remained the preserve of men and the few women who entered the press-machining trade in the 1970s and 1980s faced considerable trials.[45]

For centuries, letterpresses and formes retained a traditional design: a large cast iron *chase* (frame) that held multiple pages of tied-up metal type. In the letterpress process, press-machinists' and offsiders' tasks included lifting a prepared chase – also containing metal type – and sliding it into place on the press. Often there were two chases, of four pages each, which sat side-by-side on the letterpress flatbed. The weighty nature of letterpress labour was seen to exclude certain groups of people, on the apparent grounds of safety and presumed physical incapacity.[46] In addition, the work was perceived as dirty and dangerous, the two other reasons regularly given to make printing as a trade for women 'inappropriate'.[47]

It is true that letterpress formes were extremely heavy and often required two people (a printer and his offsider) to lift and slide onto a flatbed. In her analysis of British printers and gender

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[45] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, *Women in printing.*

[46] C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power', p. 189; R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit., p. 29.

[47] A. Game & R. Pringle, *Gender at work*, pp. 28–35.

identity in the 1970s and 1980s, Cynthia Cockburn applied a pointed feminist analysis to the heftiness of letterpress formes:

> The size and weight of the forme is arbitrary. Printing presses and the printed sheet too could have been smaller. And heavy as it is, the mechanisation exists which could ease the task. It is … purely a question of custom at what weight the use of hoists and trolleys to transport the forme is introduced.[48]

The weightiness of presswork was not an unavoidable phenomenon. The design of the forme evolved over a specific set of cultural and technological circumstances, circumstances that precluded people with smaller or weaker bodies from being involved in the process.

While letterpress work involved carrying extremely heavy formes, the plates for offset-lithography were thin lightweight sheets of aluminium. In theory, this technology meant printers could no longer claim that presswork was beyond women's assumed physical capacity, and press-machining as a trade could perhaps become friendlier for them. Unfortunately, this research confirms that deeply-held and unquestioned patriarchal prejudices remained entrenched on the shop floor at the Gov. It also demonstrates that heavy lifting was not the primary concern of female apprentices. Embodied workplace practice and mainstream workplace discourse were at odds.

Rosslyn Reed and Jessica Mander-Jones have identified that even proponents of EEO left the press-machining trade to the men, and women were directed to more 'suitable' trades, such as composing and bookbinding.[49] There was an assumption that women had an 'affinity' for typesetting, partly because it involved typing, whereas the hard, mechanical work of the press-machinist was seen as anathema to women's presumed 'natural' capacities.[50] Reed states:

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[48] C. Cockburn, 'The material of male power', p. 189.

[49] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit., p. 13.

[50] ibid., p. 14.

> Printing machinist … remains the most masculine of the printing occupations although there has been significant technological change.[51]

Reed explains that this dynamic emerged through deeply entrenched prejudices about the appropriateness of 'men's work' for women, which produces ideological barriers to women entering the press-machining trade, even though they are now entitled to do so. Sexist and prejudiced attitudes (and their consequences) existed at managerial levels as well as on the shop floor. Reed and Mander-Jones quote a printing employer in 1993 who has 'never heard of a female printer' and 'could not imagine it'.[52] While this may be a more overt example, such attitudes are often unconsciously held, even by employers using the language of anti-discrimination and EEO.[53] While the matter of physical strength became something of a moot point with the increasing proliferation of offset-lithography, this did not significantly challenge the dominant gender regime of press-machining.

The issue of heavy lifting was at the forefront of people's objections to the presence of female apprentices at the Gov. At an EEO briefing meeting in 1981, the EEO co-ordinator, Helen Ferguson, reported that:

> Some degree of hostility was aired which was aimed at the practicability of employing females as apprentices … Some of the issues raised related to the fact that 'girls cannot lift the same weights as boys', and 'it is a waste of time employing girls as apprentices as they only marry and leave the trade'.[54]

The following quotes were taken from an anonymous EEO survey of employees at the Gov that same year. The survey generated a considerable number of quotes related to female apprentices and heavy lifting. Here are a few examples:

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[51] R. Reed, 'Anti-discrimination language', p. 98.

[52] R. Reed & J. Mander-Jones, op. cit., p. 19.

[53] ibid.

[54] H. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 51. Also known as Helen Yoonie.

> We receive the same money, but males have to do the heavy lifting. (No gender specified)[55]

> Girl apprentices get far too much advantage over male apprentices … The male gets stereotyped into doing the heavy work, whereas the female gets lighter and more interesting work. (Male)[56]

> Females ask for equality, yet they are not allowed to lift weights as heavy as a man and get all the easy jobs. (Male)[57]

> Some males think we aren't strong. (Female)[58]

> Unfortunately, I am still treated as one of the fairer sex. When I came into this trade we were told the physical work is hard, but still the men seem to put us down. They say we are weak and just can't do the job. (Female)[59]

These quotes suggest that the generalised workplace discourse at the Gov focused on 'heavy lifting' as one of the reasons for exclusion and inequity, rather than taking into account prejudice and the changing nature of the labour process, for example, with lithography.

Another factor must be taken into consideration; in NSW in the 1980s, weight-lifting provisions limited the mass that women and minors were legally permitted to lift. During this period, the maximum weight that women could lift was determined by the *NSW Factories, Shops & Industries Act 1962 (No. 43)*. Women working in factories were limited to lifting 16kg, while there was no restriction for adult men. Until 1991, females over 16 years of age but under 18 (i.e., many apprentices) were limited to lifting 11.5kg, while males over 16 and under 18 years of age could lift no more than 18kg. The law was intended to protect workers from injury, an important part of reforming the health, safety and conditions of industrial workplaces in NSW,

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[55] ibid., p. 80.

[56] ibid., p. 80.

[57] ibid., p. 51.

[58] ibid., p. 51.

[59] ibid., p. 52.

which had for so long been dangerous and under-regulated.[60] Paradoxically, such weight-lifting limits essentially confirmed and gave authority to traditional presumptions about the right of men to dominate the printing trade.[61]

This issue of 'heavy' and 'light' work was a theme in the manufacturing industry as a whole, and it shaped perceptions about appropriate work on gendered lines. Connell has described a scenario in a NSW public sector worksite where lifting equipment was installed, making it possible for women to undertake the work without any problems. However, Connell explains, 'the lifting machine was chosen and mainly operated by a man',[62] illustrating here that a technological change in the labour process did not succeed in transforming the traditional division of labour even though it could have. Sociologists Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle note that 'heavy/light' was a common measure used in dividing what constituted men's and women's jobs on the factory floor.[63] They observed, however, that 'in all-female industries such as clothing and textiles, women lift weights over the legal limit – in this case it suits management'.[64] Furthermore, and this is a key distinction, Game and Pringle show that lifting was not specifically a 'women's issue'. In the matter of lifting, what was at stake was masculinity:

> We were told that this is 'light work that men won't do'. A very telling statement which implies that the distinction has less to do with the physical capabilities of women than with men's sense of what kind of work is appropriate for them.[65]

In the following quote from Geoff Hawes, this precise dynamic is suggested. Geoff explains how the male compositors did not like to witness women lifting heavy formes; it made some of them uncomfortable:

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[60] I am indebted to Professor Judy Wajcman for this observation, April 2012.

[61] A. Game & R. Pringle, op. cit., p. 30.

[62] R.W. Connell, 'Glass ceilings or gendered institutions?', p. 841.

[63] A. Game & R. Pringle, op. cit., p. 29.

[64] ibid., p. 30.

[65] ibid., p. 30.

Jesse: How did women, or weaker, smaller men, cope with those sorts of heavy lifting jobs?

Geoff: Well, it's funny. That's where the 'gentleman' came into play. You didn't want the women to lift the heavy chases, so if they worked on 'em, we'd always get another guy to lift 'em down and move them.[66]

In 1978 the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board called for the removal of gender-specific weight-lifting provisions, on the grounds that they had the effect of discriminating against people on the basis of sex, regardless of the actual nature of work. Section 36 of the *Factories, Shops & Industries Act* was repealed on 17 December 1991, resulting in a new regulation that had no gender-based restrictions.[67]

What tradesmen said about women in printing

The tradesmen I interviewed had a variety of opinions on women in printing trades, but they often referred back to the heftiness of the work as the reason why women did not, or should not, become press-machinists. Press-machinist Glenn MacKellar felt that lithography was more appropriate for women, in part because the work was not as heavy as letterpress:

> The female apprentice printers, they were fine. Particularly in litho, because there wasn't the heavy lifting involved, compared to the letterpress days. Letterpress was heavy. But in litho it wasn't so bad, you know, if something's too strong for you, you get somebody to help. They didn't really need to do that in the litho days, which was good for them. A lot of them had an offsider anyway, on the big machines, to load the paper in and you know, the machines had two people so … you just get your offsider to do it, if you've got a big one.[68]

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66 Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

67 With grateful thanks to Chris Ronalds S.C. for her clarification on this matter.

68 Rudi Kolbach, interview with author, 12 December 2011.

When asked how the other tradesmen reacted to having women as press-machinists, Glenn explained:

> Oh, I think the old blokes thought it was a bit of a novelty, but most of them just treated them the same as anybody else. They were sort of, most of the girls that were apprentices were <pause> sort of a bit mechanically minded anyway. There wasn't, you know, your stereotypical dumb blonde in high heels, there wasn't any of those, not that they were unattractive or anything like that, but they were practical people. And as such, they behaved like practical people … But no I never experienced any, you know, 'She'll never make a good printer because she's a woman'. I never heard anybody say that. Most of the old blokes used to encourage it, just help them along … And they weren't feminists either as such, militant feminists, you know? They were just people coming in who wanted to do an apprenticeship … There was no confrontation from their point of view either. They weren't sort of, 'Oh, you're just being hard on me 'cos I'm a woman,' and all that sort of thing, they weren't like that. They weren't treated like that and they didn't act like that.[69]

Former Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville was positive about the introduction of female apprentices into both composing and press-machining, but acknowledged that others at the Gov were less enthusiastic about the transition. Again, the weight of the formes is mentioned:

> People said, 'Ah, they'll never work,'
> 'Ah, they don't have enough toilets,' oh, there'd always be problems.
> But then … when they come along they were great, they were great for the industry. They were the best students … Carrying all those formes around was pretty heavy. And I suppose women could've done it …
> There's no reason why women can't do it. I mean, it was just a hangover from the old days I think.[70]

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[69] Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011.

[70] Lindsay Somerville, interview with author, 15 December 2011.

Other interview participants from the Gov were less accepting of women's presence in the pressroom and were openly disapproving of their introduction into non-traditional trades. Arguments against the introduction of female printing apprentices often used traditional breadwinner concepts to back up claims for male privilege. Compositor George Woods said:

> They started employing women. Now, if you ask me what I thought about that – tell me if I'm out of order here – but a guy, traditionally, when he's born, his brain says, 'I am to work until I retire to support a wife and a family, that is my job in life.' <pause> But what got me was every time they would employ a young woman, it took a position away from a young man, who really wanted to do something like printing <pause> but then, in a number of years, the young woman would be gone. <pause> They'd always leave.[71]

Contrary to this perception, apprentice dropout rates at the Gov from 1977 to 1981 were actually 20 per cent for males and 17 per cent for females.[72]

The realities of embodied practice in press-machining

In contrast to this workplace concern about heavy lifting, my interview with Anna Lyons indicated that she did not see lifting as the primary challenge to be overcome. For Anna, the main challenges were harassment, insults and inappropriate attention. Compositors and press-machinists (gender notwithstanding) both experienced the challenge of lifting heavy letterpress formes, but in practice, tradespeople found ways to adapt. Anna explained how in practical terms, lifting was a challenge that could be shared:

> Now, well, the letterpress formes, they *are* heavier. That's a heavier type of printing. Definitely! But there's ways around that too. I never had much of a problem. I used to do the milk-run with Dad, so I was already fairly strong and fit anyway, and I was in my early twenties <pause> and

[71] George Woods, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

[72] H. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 52.

> I considered myself fairly strong in my arms. I found that whenever we did a big forme from the letterpress, I just grabbed the offsider and said, 'Give us a hand with this' and he'd grab the other end … And of course then you've gotta place it [the forme] on the bed, and I found that when you're using a special key thing to tighten it up all around the place, that can get a little bit physical. But you're leaning *down* into it, not going up above your shoulder. I found anything up above your shoulder quite hard, but when you're leaning down, you're just leaning *onto* the machine. Then usually your offsider is around on the other side, he's actually helping, even though they're not supposed to but they do. You'd be there for hours, getting it all set up. You end up having a chat on either side of the flatbed together, while you're doing your work. So [letterpress] wasn't actually that bad, but it was definitely heavier, and the machines were old style.[73]

Anna acknowledged that letterpress was definitely 'heavier' work than lithography, but to her the heaviness of the work was something that could be easily managed because it was shared. Having an offsider was part of the process and it also made the work more social.

While lifting limitations were a significant factor in rationalising sexist and unequal opportunity in jobs at the Gov, the workplace focus on lifting failed to account for the variety of physical movements performed by printers. Anna described how she overcame any 'bodily disadvantage' by working out different physical techniques for engaging with presses:

> The Roland [litho press] was quite difficult. You're tightening up rows of bolts above your shoulder. Sometimes you'd kill it,[74] you'd feel physically strong. Other days you're not 100 per cent. I'd be up on my tip-toes, that's how big it is. You're reaching up, doing a line of bolts. I worked out a way of getting around it. I ended up crawling up on half the inkwell. I did find it difficult, and I'm sure the guys did too, because they're doing the same, but they do have a

[73] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012. Italics indicate speaker's emphasis.

[74] 'Kill it' – colloquial for doing a really proper job.

> bit more upper strength. But I ended up crawling half-way up the bottom ink well, so I was kind of crouching, so I could reach better. You work out ways.[75]

The physicality of press-operation was not restricted to lifting. It required a wide variety of physical actions, instances of 'working out ways': crouching, crawling, climbing, pushing, pulling, lifting, tightening, observing, standing and waiting.

Kim Cooper also explained her ways of adapting to the weightiness of paper (in bookbinding). This is another form of physically 'working out ways' with the objects around you:

> When they'd put you on something like guillotine operating, where you'd carry a full ream of paper, like … you're talking about <gestures 1m width> that size. So to carry that and put it into the guillotine, cut it and put it all up … now I couldn't do a full ream at one time. Some of the guys, like, most guys, they could do a full ream at a time, but I could only do half a ream at a time. But you worked twice as fast – so you still got it done as quick, if not quicker, at the end of the day. You always had to be up there, never behind in your work.[76]

Kim's commitment to excellence reminds us that one of the ways that tradeswomen in non-traditional trades coped with the challenge of working in highly-charged, male-dominated environments was to focus on the quality of their work,[77] on getting it 'just right'. Social scientist Marjorie Johnston's research into women in non-traditional professions uncovered similar stories:

> If one of the other apprentices had a bad day, it was:
> 'Had a rough night, didja, mate?' They were individuals and accepted that way, but my whole sex was on trial … The thing that kept me going against all this opposition was the thrill of getting something that didn't

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[75] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

[76] Kim Cooper, interview with author, 29 November 2011.

[77] M. Johnston, op. cit., p. 28.

> work, pulling it apart, working out the problem fixing it, rebuilding the machine and standing back as it worked once more.[78]

The only way to gain proficiency at this work was prolonged exposure to it, and some printers were anxious to spend more time on a variety of machines, so that they didn't lose the 'knack' – that manual, pre-reflective, embodied knowledge of using a machine. Anna explained that sometimes she was left on an 'easier' machine (such as a small-offset machine) for long periods. Her concern was not so much that she had been given easier work, but, she said, 'if you don't operate certain machines for a little while, you just lose it a bit'.[79]

Industrial lifting limits for women were not only discriminatory, they also represented something of a misinterpretation of the physical nature of work in the pressroom. The use of large presses involved a whole gamut of physical movements and embodied 'ways of knowing'. Despite the rhetoric of the day – as evidenced in archival materials, interviews and EEO reports – the matter was never as simple as 'how much can you lift?' Even with lithographic presses in the Main Pressroom, the associative power of letterpress weighed heavy in the hearts and minds of printers at the Gov, as we have seen in Chapter Four. Although the distinctions that had divided letterpress and lithographic printers dissolved by the mid-1980s, for some the gendered politics of printing remained highly compartmentalised and steeped in tradition.

As Ava Baron has observed, right at the moment that letterpress technology was losing its dominance in the printing industry, male press-machinists increasingly valorised muscular masculinity and physical strength.[80] They did this in defensiveness, as they saw those particular qualities waning in relevance. The emphasis on the heavy nature of press-operation was one way in which printers protected the last printing trade to remain a male preserve. Notwithstanding the lightness of lithographic plates, there was nothing easy about female printers' experiences

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[78] Judy Siddons, quoted in ibid., p. 28.

[79] Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

[80] A. Baron (2006), 'Masculinity, the embodied male worker, and the historian's gaze', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 69, Spring, p. 147.

during this transitional period. Forming a clearer understanding of tradeswomen's experience at the Gov in the 1970s and 1980s involved developing some understanding of the technologies of letterpress and lithography – especially the awareness that formes are heavy and plates are light – and an open mind towards women's adaptive bodily capacities in industrial contexts. Here, once again, is a history where gender, physical and material worlds and the trappings of prejudice and tradition are tangled together in a story of labour and technological change.

9. Foreign orders & everyday transgressions: creativity at a time of institutional decline

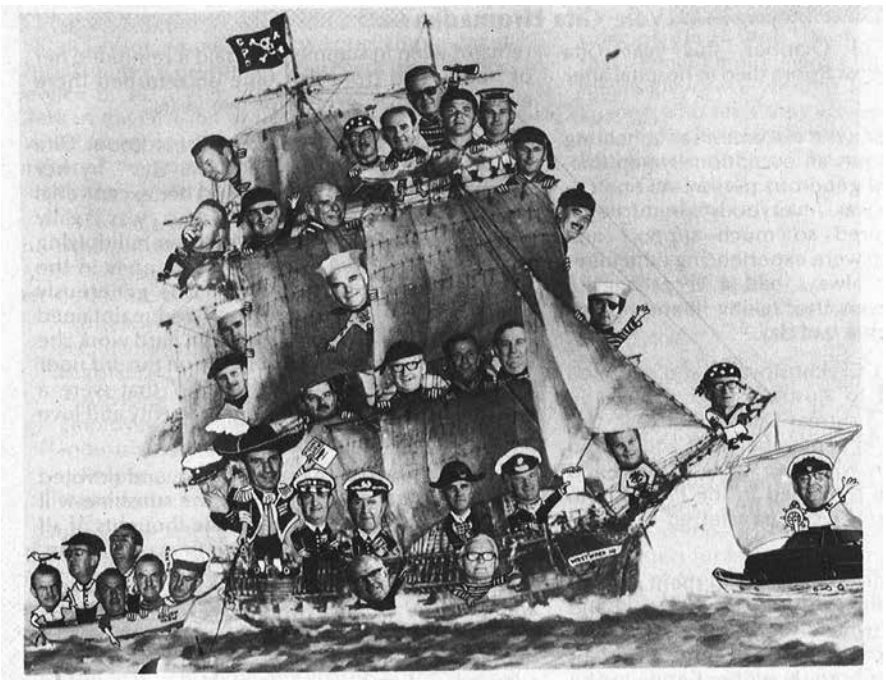

Fig. 107 **Pirate ship depicting members of the Government Printing Office**, photographic and hand-drawn illustration, published in *The Graphic* (staff journal), December 1985.

Introduction

> Oh, there was a lot of foreign orders, there's no two ways about it.[1]

In previous chapters we have seen hints of the unofficial creative practices that took place at the Gov. The brief reference to the 'Mad Men Only' door in Chapter Three points to the existence of a workplace culture characterised by pranks and practical jokes, as well as mischievous and irreverent attitudes towards the strict traditions and conventions at the Gov. In Chapter Four we saw how press-machinist Ray Utick felt compelled to photograph and film the machinery in the pressroom, thoroughly cataloguing each machine for his own personal collection and undertaking this endeavour in work time. Likewise, in Chapter Six we saw how retrained compositors engaged in programming 'play' on the new typesetting computers, designing games and graphic images for non-work purposes. Gita Hromadka's transformation of the women's toilets into a lush garden space, as described in Chapter Seven, is also an example of unsanctioned, creative expression at work.

Labour historians in Australia and internationally have charted the existence of playful workplace antics in twentieth century shop floor contexts.[2] Industrial workplaces often featured a culture dominated by teasing, jousting, games (such as Trugo),[3] practical jokes and the initiation of boy apprentices. Certainly, working life at the Gov was marked by all of these characteristics, with sometimes terrible consequences for the victims of abuse, as well as positive outcomes for those who felt bonded by workplace play, pranks and camaraderie. In this respect the Gov was very similar to other twentieth-century Australian working-class labour contexts.

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[1] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[2] P. Thompson (1988), 'Playing at being skilled men: Factory culture and pride in work skills among Coventry car workers', *Social History*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 45–69; G. Seal (1989), 'The folklore of work', in *The hidden culture: Folklore in Australian society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 109–31; J. Shields (1992), 'Craftsmen in the making: The memory and meaning of apprenticeship in Sydney between the Great War and the Great Depression', in J. Shields (ed.), *All our labours: Oral histories of working life in twentieth century Sydney*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, pp. 86–122; S. Meyer (2001), 'Work, play, and power: Masculine culture on the automotive shop floor, 1930–1960', in R. Horowitz (ed.), *Boys and their toys? Masculinity, technology and class in America*, Routledge, New York and London, pp. 13–32.

[3] Trugo is a workers' game that emerged from Victorian railway workshops in the 1920s. It used available scraps and workplace materials to make goal posts and mallets.

What has attracted less attention in academic discourse is the *unofficial* production of *things* by factory workers, and the creativity and ingenuity that characterises many of these practices.

Workplace practical jokes frequently involve the careful creation of props, contraptions, visual tricks and physical tomfoolery. In this way, a culture of pranks and practical jokes is fundamentally material and embodied. At the Gov, this playful culture emerged out of the myriad of clever, cheeky and sometimes cruel ways in which workers could design and manipulate the objects and materials around them so as to play tricks on their supervisors, colleagues and apprentices. In addition, and complementarily, another kind of unofficial creative production was taking place in Australian factory contexts in this period, including at the Gov. During work time, some of the Gov's employees discreetly created extra products for their own private use. Here I am chiefly referring to the popular (but often concealed) labour practice of making *foreign orders*.

A foreign order is an industrial euphemism used in NSW to refer to an object that was designed and produced in a factory, in work time, using factory materials, but without a legitimate work ticket. In other words, the Gov's workers may have been printing official publications such as *Hansard*, but their energy was also quietly directed towards designing, printing, binding and distributing unsanctioned items such as the *Suzi Quatro Fanclub Newsletter*. This chapter brings these creative (and in some definitions, morally ambiguous)[4] workplace practices into shaper focus. It is about the innovative, artistic, and playful acts undertaken at the Gov that were not strictly 'work', but often involved skill, creative intelligence, guile, humour and resourcefulness. Focusing on the production of foreign orders allows us to explore the creative disruption of surplus value by the labouring classes at a time when they had more tactile control of the production process than workers tend to have today. This focus also enables us to see another example where labour history is appropriately intertwined with considerations of material culture.

[4] My use of the term 'morally ambiguous' is a reference to Jennifer Harris' use of this term in J. Harris (2009), 'The grey world of foreigner production', in J. Harris (ed.), *Foreigners: Secret artefacts of industrialism*, Black Swan Press, Perth, p. 5.

While *foreign orders* is the term used in NSW, in Western Australia and Queensland the term is *foreigners*. In South Australia the terms *foreignies* and *homers* have been recorded.[5] In the United States they are also known as *homers* (as well as *government jobs*) and in France they have various names, including *la perruque*, *bricoles*, *bousilles*, *pindilles* and *pinailles*.[6] In Britain the more familiar terms are *idling* or *pilfering* (although these terms can also simply mean stealing or taking). Foreign orders are linked to the British workplace practice of *fiddling* or *playing the fiddle* (work limitation) and the customary taking of *perquisites* ('perks' or in-kind payments).[7] While scholarly analysis of foreign orders is fairly limited in English language publications,[8] practices such as pilfering and playing the fiddle have attracted some attention in the fields of social history and sociology, as will be outlined in the following section of this chapter.

The first time I encountered the term 'foreign order' was during the fourth interview for the Government Printing Office Oral History Project. Graeme Murray, a former lithographic dot-etcher and retoucher, explained:

> Within the [printing] industry a foreign order is a pretty standard practice. You know, some kid in a … basketball team, or something like that, they'd want a poster done. It'd be done unofficially, on a sort of tit-for-tat basis. You'd do something for them, they'd sort of say, 'Do you want anything done?'[9]

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[5] B. Oliver (2009), 'Making foreigners at the Midland Government Railway Workshops', in *Foreigners*, p. 27.

[6] M. Anteby (2003), 'Factory "homers": Understanding a highly elusive, marginal, and illegal practice', *Sociologie du Travail*, vol. 45, pp. 453–71; trans. by the author, online at http://www.people.hbs.edu/manteby/SocioduTravail-English.pdf, p. e24; C. Power (2010), 'Book review: Foreigners: Secret artefacts of industrialism', *Labour History*, vol. 98, May, p. 263.

[7] J. Ditton (1977), 'Perks, pilferage and the fiddle: The historical structure of invisible wages', *Theory and Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 39–71.

[8] The phenomena of foreign orders are given specific attention in: M. Anteby, 'Factory "homers"'; M. Anteby (2003), 'The "moralities" of poaching: Manufacturing personal artifacts on the factory floor', *Ethnography*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 217–39; J. Harris (ed.), *Foreigners*, op. cit.; M. de Certeau (1984), *The practice of everyday life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London; R. Kosmann (1999), 'La perruque ou le travail masqué', *Histoire*, vol. 11, June, pp. 20–27. A similar but subtly different phenomenon was explored in Jean-Luc Moulène's *24 Objets de Grève*, a photo-graphic archive recording objects created by French workers while on strike, between the 1970s and the 1990s. These objects were designed to be sold in order to financially support the striking workers, so in that sense their reason for production differed from foreign orders or la perruque. See P. Magagnoli (2012), 'Moulène, Rancière and *24 Objets de Grève*: Productive ambivalence or reifying opacity?', *Philosophy of Photography*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 155–71.

[9] Graeme Murray, interview with author, 9 September 2011.

Note how Graeme explains the practice in relation to a social contract. While individuals produced foreign orders for themselves, the practice was very often a collaborative one, it was part of a social agreement and certain supervisors would turn a blind eye. Workers might leave their work area and wander into other sections, seeking out someone they trusted to get a job finished. In this way, the practice of foreign orders – as with practical jokes and pranks – was fundamentally a social activity and part of a collective culture, not simply one of hidden individual production 'under the work bench'.

The existence of foreign orders demonstrates how the realms of work, culture and materiality can be densely intertwined. Australian folklore historian Graham Seal has argued that foreign orders are material evidence of the 'hidden' folklore of the workplace.[10] As Seal points out, the production of foreign orders is not limited to industrial scenarios; they were (and are) a feature of office contexts, too.[11] At times foreign orders were required of apprentices to extend their training. Some bosses quietly endorsed the production of foreign orders, while others determinedly cracked down on the practice. In other manufacturing contexts, such as metalwork and railways, foreign orders could include the production of hand-tools, toys, domestic objects, handmade billies for cooking lunch and farewell gifts for departing workers. Such items usually needed to be small enough to smuggle out of the factory, but workers would go to great lengths to conceal large items or remove them from the workplace in pieces. Some foreign orders required a number of workers to collaborate – often from different sections – while others could be produced by one person.[12]

It would be reductive to examine foreign orders in isolation from other workplace antics. This is because it is near impossible to draw a strict definitional line between the workplace practices of pranks, foreign orders and play; such practices blur and overlap. Consequently this chapter

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[10] G. Seal, 'The folklore of work', p. 38; see also G. Seal (2009), 'Foreigners in workplace culture', in *Foreigners,* pp. 38–47.

[11] ibid.

[12] G. Seal, 'Foreigners in workplace culture'; B. Oliver, 'Making foreigners at the Midland Government Workshops'; S. Smith (2009), 'Foreigners: "The forbidden artefact"', in *Foreigners*, pp. 14–25.

also explores other 'everyday transgressions', such as practical jokes and pranks, and provides examples of printed foreign orders generated at the Gov. Finally, this chapter explores the way in which the production of foreign orders became less concealed and more political as the workers' circumstances became more insecure and unstable.

Perquisites, pilfering and la perruque: existing studies

French theorist Michel de Certeau celebrates the subversive yet ordinary nature of foreign orders in his influential publication, *The practice of everyday life*. Using the term *la perruque*, de Certeau defines foreign orders as a subtle form of resistance, where 'order is tricked by an art'.[13] De Certeau describes la perruque as a popular and rebellious tactic that can be deployed by any worker who wishes to maintain resistance to a dominant and repressive capitalist social order, noting that the term is the French word for 'the wig', in other words, 'a disguise'. De Certeau describes la perruque as a form of free and creative diversion thus:

> La perruque is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. La perruque may be as simple a matter as a secretary writing a love letter on company time or as complex as a cabinet maker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room … The worker who indulges in la perruque actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative and precisely not directed toward profit.[14]

De Certeau's definition is somewhat idealistic and prescriptive; workers did, at times, use 'new' materials for foreign orders, not just scraps, and in rare instances foreign orders were sold for profit.[15] Of the industrial worker who practices la perruque, de Certeau says:

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[13] M. de Certeau, op. cit., p. 26.

[14] ibid., p. 25.

[15] J. Harris, 'The grey world of foreigner production', p. 6.

> He cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work, and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through spending his time this way.[16]

Again we can see that foreign orders are understood as a social practice, founded on interactions between workers and enhancing their solidarity. There are those who turn a blind eye and those who work secretly and collaboratively to produce unsanctioned objects; but both groups silently accept the clandestine practice. De Certeau's definition of la perruque is probably the most popular and well-known description. He notes that la perruque emerged when workers replicated tactics from a pre-industrial past, although he is fairly oblique in connecting la perruque to historical 'peasant' practices. The historical connection between the taking of perquisites and the practice of foreign orders has been explored in more detail by other historians and theorists, as outlined below.

Sociologist Jason Ditton has examined the historical antecedents to the 'invisible wage system' of twentieth century factories, which featured workplace practices of pilferage and fiddling.[17] Drawing on British social history, Ditton traces the practices of pilfering and in-kind payment back to English feudal customary rights and the commons. For example, the Common of Estover was the 'right of common to take wood from the Lord's lands and forests' and the Common of Turbary was the 'right to cut peat and turf for fuel'.[18] Seventeenth century customary rights included the taking of perquisites and the gifting of *vails*.[19] Perquisites could be surplus food from the larder, scrapings, tailings, scraps, wastage and other favours offered by the ruling class to rural labourers and servants.

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[16] M. de Certeau, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

[17] J. Ditton, 'Perks, pilferage and the fiddle', pp. 39–71; J. Ditton (1977), *Part-time crime: An ethnography of fiddling and pilferage*, Macmillan, London.

[18] J. Ditton, 'Perks, pilferage and the fiddle', p. 40.

[19] A vail is an occasional profit, an addition to a salary or a gratuity, typically given to a servant. The term was used in seventeenth-century England.

As social historians E.P. Thompson, Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, Peter d'Sena and Adrian Randall have all observed, in eighteenth century England the loss of common rights (and their replacement with legal rights) led to an increasing state of legal ambiguity in relation to workers' rights, privileges and in-kind payments.[20] With the growth of industrialisation, and as rural lands were increasingly reclassified as 'private' by ruling elites, the customary taking of in-kind perquisites began to be redefined as theft.[21] The eighteenth century thus witnessed a change whereby the worker was increasingly paid in the form of monetary wages, and the perquisites to which they were accustomed were reclassified and reconfigured, frequently resulting in the reframing of labourers as thieves, part of a newly-defined criminal underclass.

Randall has explored how the line between embezzlement and perquisites was arbitrary and ever-changing in England's expanding manufacturing industry in the eighteenth century, where the act of collecting scrapings and wastage was seen by workers as 'sanctified by custom' in order to supplement their low wages.[22] By the nineteenth century the practice was essentially criminalised, although the taking of perquisites continued in industrial and rural contexts.[23] As Ditton has observed, understanding this historical background of perquisites and pilferage as a 'lingering vestige of the annexation of customary rights by the ruling class' allows us to better understand why such behaviours emerge, rather than falling back on assumptions that the working class is simply criminal and amoral.[24]

In twentieth century factory contexts, the practices of making foreign orders and pilfering demonstrate the extent to which twentieth century workers are heirs of this baggage of moral ambiguity and disagreement about the extent of workers' rights and privileges. Labour historian

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[20] P. d'Sena (1989), 'Perquisites and casual labour on the London wharfside in the eighteenth century', *The London Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 130–47; D. Hay (1975), *Albion's fatal tree: Crime and society in eighteenth century England*, Allen Lane, London; P. Linebaugh (2006), *The London hanged: Crime and civil society in the eighteenth century*, Verso, London; A.J. Randall (1990), 'Peculiar perquisites and pernicious practices', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 193–219; E.P. Thompson (1974), 'Patrician society, plebian culture', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 382–405; E.P. Thompson (1975), *Whigs and hunters: The origin of the Black Act*, Allen Lane, London.

[21] E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician society', p. 384.

[22] A.J. Randall, op. cit., pp. 193–94.

[23] P. d'Sena, op. cit., pp. 141–43.

[24] J. Ditton, 'Perks, pilferage, and the fiddle', p. 45.

Anna Green describes how in the 1990s, labour history moved beyond the 'rather narrow control/resistance paradigm' to show some of the more ambivalent or complex ways in which workers operated in conflict (albeit sometimes in apparent cooperation) with their capitalist employers.[25] The customary labour practices of pilfering, playing the fiddle and foreign orders differ from more overt forms of industrial resistance such as strikes and machine-breaking, precisely because foreign orders and perquisites were undertaken in secretive ways, to avoid discovery, to keep the world of work quietly rumbling along. The practices outlined by Green do not include foreign orders, but they do include subtle strategies such as *spelling* (the unauthorised taking of breaks), *gliding* (leaving work early) and *go-slows* (the term is self-evident). Green defines these actions as historically contingent and deeply embedded in the culture of working life, not as a sudden and specific reaction to technological change.[26] She also notes that such practices were not officially condoned by unions.[27]

In relation to twentieth century workplaces, sociologists such as Ditton, Gerald Mars and Donald Horning have examined the prevalence of pilfering and fiddling in a variety of workplaces; such practices have sometimes been defined in morally judgmental terms such as 'workplace deviance'.[28] In 1970 Horning examined pilfering at a mid-western American electronics assembly plant; the study functions more as a primary resource today, making some useful observations about the ideas attached to objects within the plant at the time.[29] Horning observed that material objects within the electronics factory had a variety of ownership ideas associated with them. There was property that was owned by the company, there was personal property owned by the workers and there was property of 'uncertain ownership'.[30] The ambiguity

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[25] A. Green (1992), 'Spelling, go-slows, gliding away and theft: Informal control over work on the New Zealand waterfront 1915–1951', *Labour History*, vol. 63, pp. 100–14.

[26] ibid., pp. 101–02.

[27] ibid., p. 113.

[28] S. Ackroyd & P. Thompson (1999), 'The recalcitrant worker', *Organizational misbehaviour*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi, pp. 31–52; D.N.M. Horning (1970), 'Blue-collar theft: Conceptions of property, attitudes toward pilfering, and work group norms in a modern industrial plant', in E.O. Smigel & H.L. Ross (eds), *Crimes against bureaucracy*, Van Nostrand-Reinhold, New York and London, pp. 46–64; G. Mars (1974), 'Dock pilferage: A case study in occupational theft', in P. Rock & M. McIntosh (eds), *Deviance and social control*, The British Sociological Association, London; J. Ditton, *Part-time crime*; J. Ditton, 'Perks, pilferage and the fiddle'.

[29] D.N.M. Horning, op. cit.

[30] ibid., pp. 51–52.

of this last category was seen as fair game by the workers, and they did not consider that pilfering items in this category was something about which to be ashamed (even if they still went to efforts to conceal their bounty). Thus a moral code developed unofficially within the factory; workers did not pilfer from each other, but items of uncertain ownership were justifiable targets. Horning concluded that the 'work group culture contains sets of norms which deal with pilfering'.[31] The more interesting implication of his research relates to the ambiguous status of material objects in a factory context, that is, how a space filled with *things* can have complex and contradictory notions of ownership, value and use, and how these objects are bound up within a changing moral code.[32] The lingering presence of these ambiguous things can prompt workers to act in this way, particularly if they are bored, underpaid and dissatisfied with their work and conditions (i.e. if they become more conscious of their exploitation).

In 1999, Stephen Ackroyd and Paul Thompson described workplace fiddling, absenteeism, pilfering and soldiering as part of a broader set of practices that factory workers collectively agreed were acceptable forms of resistance and justifiable extras, considering the surplus profit extracted from them by their employers. As with the earlier work by Ditton and Mars, Ackroyd and Thompson describe how workers subscribed to a code where they felt they could knowingly break the law because they did not define their own actions as morally problematic.[33] In simpler terms, the workers knew their employers had the money and the power, and the pilfering of small items seemed a justifiable in-kind consolation for workers giving their labour for another person's profit.

Notwithstanding some workers' collective belief in the moral acceptability of pilfering and foreign orders, it is often difficult to persuade workers to talk about such practices, for fear of reprisals and concerns about reputation and breaking their code of silence. French sociologist

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[31] ibid., p. 63.

[32] Things, of course, have their own difficult and slippery nature. This adds further ambiguity to their status. See for example B. Brown (2001), 'Thing theory', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 1–22.

[33] J. Ditton, 'Perks, pilferage and the fiddle'; J. Ditton, *Part-time crime*; S. Ackroyd & P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 38; G. Mars, op. cit., p. 209.

Michel Anteby's 2003 study into the (contemporary) making of homers at a French aeronautics plant examines the ways in which foreign orders have remained an elusive and marginal practice, at the fringes of labour analysis.[34] He describes how workers at the aeronautics plant designed and created useful domestic objects (such as key chains, ashtrays, TV antennas and toys) and smuggled them out; few were willing to speak about the practice. Significantly, Anteby observes how foreign orders fall outside both traditional labour histories and corporate history narratives, as they are not 'respectable' forms of work practice, nor are they examples of strong, collective industrial action (since they only operate by 'diverting flows' and are therefore a form of adaptation to methods of control in contexts featuring 'already lost battles').[35] He reasons that because foreign orders do not fit these existing historical frameworks and because workers are unwilling or unable to talk about them, such practices are little known and sometimes misunderstood.

Returning to the oral history interviews undertaken about the Gov, many participants were understandably reluctant to give details of practices that they knew to be technically illegal (albeit taking place at a factory that closed down in 1989). There were concerns about reputation and solidarity with other workers. In addition, some likely subscribed to the notion that creating foreign orders was a practice that you simply 'don't talk about'.[36] Not all workers felt this way. Linotype operator Bob Law did not consider foreign orders to be off-limits, but he told me how he encountered reticence when talking to his former workmates:

> I went to a reunion for some of the old 'Gov' employees and … asked around about … foreign orders, and to my surprise, no one was forthcoming about foreign orders at all.[37]

Only a few workers were extremely proud of their foreign orders, and more than happy to be identified with them, as we shall see later in this chapter.

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[34] M. Anteby, 'Factory homers', p. e23.

[35] ibid., p. e34.

[36] This is similar to the experience Harris and Oliver had with the 'Foreigners' exhibition. See Oliver, 'Making foreigners', p. 30.

[37] Bob Law, personal communication with author, 15 November 2013.

In Western Australia in 2009, Jennifer Harris curated an exhibition of hundreds of foreign orders (in this case using the WA term 'foreigners'). These foreigners were produced at the Midland Government Railway Workshops, north-east of Perth. Like the Gov, the Midland workshops were government-owned (and closed down in 1994). The exhibition, claimed by Harris as the 'only time that a group of foreigners has been assembled', was entitled 'Foreigners: Secret Artefacts of Industrialism'.[38] This is close to the truth; despite the international prevalence of the practice in twentieth century factories and offices, the only other exhibition of foreign orders that I have discovered was a 1984 exhibition of a hundred 'retirement homers' (foreign orders made for departing workers) held by the Labour Council of Snecma Evry-Corbeil in France.[39] In these post-industrial days, at a time when the last vestiges of the car manufacturing industry are terminating in Australia, perhaps the time is ripe for further analysis of expiring workplace culture in declining industrial contexts.

How can we get past the obvious in discussing foreign orders? One way is to consider the specificities of each labour context and historical period. Harris has expressed concern that curatorial and analytic approaches often enthuse about foreign orders uniformly in terms of worker 'resistance'. She argues that the cultural studies' tendency to describe so many everyday actions as forms of resistance 'emphasises [resistance] to a degree which is unsustainable'.[40] While a worker's diversion of goods towards his or her own private ends is certainly an act of insubordination in the workplace, Harris points out that there are other motivations at play, above and beyond the workers' (possible) desire to struggle against the dominant relations of capitalist production. She explains that other reasons for the production of foreign orders include the desire to improve one's skill, the social pattern of producing gifts for departing workers, apprentice training, casual opportunism, instrumental purposes such as making tools and the alleviation of boredom.[41]

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[38] J. Harris, 'The grey world of foreigner production', p. 6.

[39] M. Anteby, 'Factory homers', p. e26.

[40] J. Harris, 'Resistance? Foreigner production in the Midland Railway Workshops', p. 62.

[41] ibid.

Harris' concern about making overly enthusiastic claims about politicised workers shows wise restraint, although I would not discount entirely the possibility of foreign orders as a form of worker resistance. Using the position of historian Eric Hobsbawm, it could be argued that it does not necessarily matter what the workers' stated motivations were. As industrial workers they could be said to be acting on what Hobsbawm calls a 'pre-political discontent'.[42] These workers found themselves working within social and labour systems that had particular conditions and particular opportunities, and the opportunity to produce extra goods was an option that was available at some times. Regardless of a worker's intention, the act of creating a foreign order by its very nature implicitly, and no matter how subtly, undercuts the authority of the prevailing system. This undercutting may not occur on a large scale, but however small, it is a form of resistance to the status quo. This resistance is embedded in the foreign order as an object.

As sociologist Michael Burawoy has observed, it is problematic to regard the industrial worker as simply 'resigned to the inherent deprivation of working'.[43] Rather, he argues, 'workers go to great lengths to compensate for, or to minimise, the deprivations they experience'.[44] The realities of work necessarily lead to 'deprivations' (such as boredom, tiredness and injury), yet this prompts workers to seek 'relative satisfactions'.[45] Such 'satisfactions' can take the form of games and play. One question that has plagued labour sociologists such as Burawoy, however, is the degree to which these games are a challenge to the prevailing authority, or whether they constitute a passive capitulation, a mere diversion that conceals the reality of exploitation. In Burawoy's analysis, when employers support and encourage the playing of games it can assist them to obscure the true relations of production. Conversely, management-sanctioned competitive games can cause the workers to become individualised, thus separating them from the collective practices and group cohesion of the unions.[46] If, however, game playing is the

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[42] E.J. Hobsbawm (1959), *Primitive rebels: Studies in archaic forms of social movements in 19th and 20th centuries*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York and Toronto, p. 147.

[43] M. Burawoy (1979), *Manufacturing consent: Changes in the labor process under monopoly capitalism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p. 77.

[44] ibid., p. 78.

[45] ibid., p. 78.

[46] ibid., 81.

'spontaneous, autonomous, malevolent creation of workers', then such practices can operate as forms of resistance to existing power structures.[47] Foreign orders fit into the latter camp, precisely because the practice is spontaneous, worker-led and done in quiet solidarity with other workers.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Four, historian Paul Thompson has offered explanations for the way in which twentieth century car-manufacturing workers responded to technological change at a factory in Coventry, England:

> How, then, did a workforce in whose culture the belief in skill was so deep-rooted react to the changing nature of work in the car factory? Three kinds of response were possible. One was to try to avoid track-work [a change to the labour process]. One was to try to change its character. The last was to accept it, but to put one's heart elsewhere.[48]

Thompson later explains that 'putting one's heart elsewhere' is one way of explaining the practice of workplace games on the shop floor. While his example is quite specific, and it refers to the way in which auto-workers played 'games' with time and production, Thompson's notion of 'putting ones heart elsewhere' can be interpreted in a slightly different way. It offers a speculative theorisation of how and why the Gov's employees also generated a great deal of extra creative activity 'on the side', and it helps to explain the constant prevalence of workplace play, pranks, jokes and irreverent attitudes. Put simply, unofficial creative production was another way of putting one's heart elsewhere. The following section engages further with the issue of boredom, free time and its material results in the workplace.

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[47] ibid., p. 85.

[48] P. Thompson, 'Playing at being skilled men', p. 58.

Boredom and creative pranks

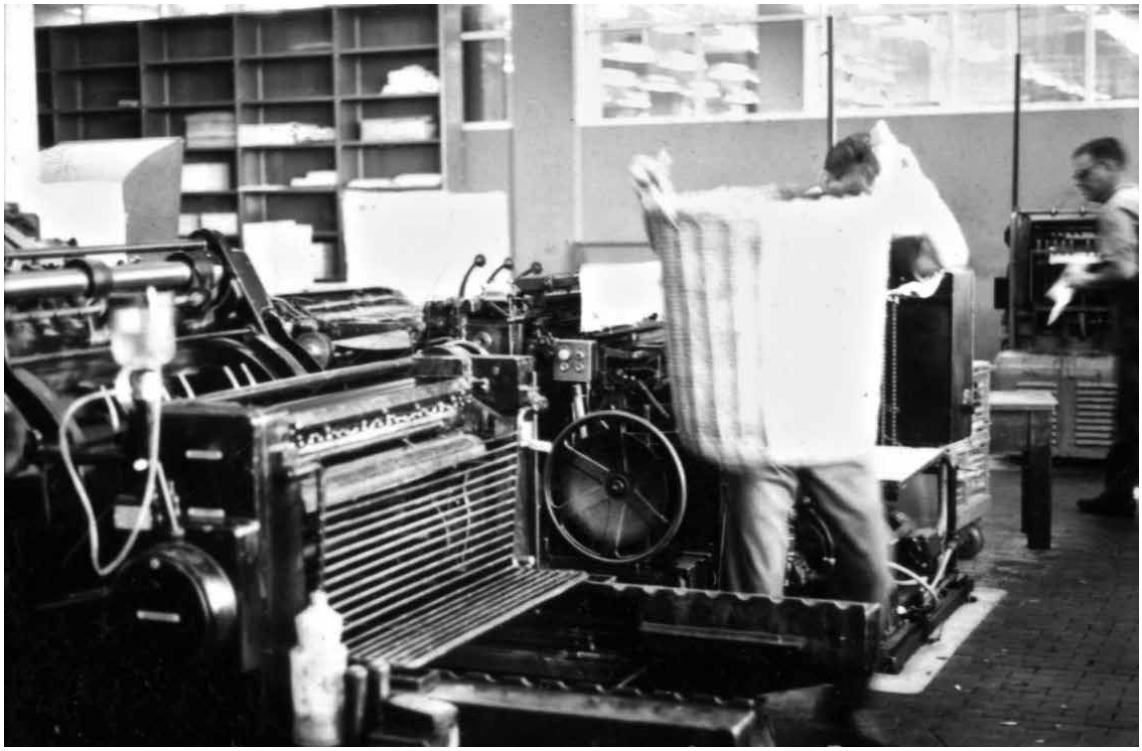

Fig. 108 **Press-machinist apprentice Allan Whitney wearing a waste-paper basket, mucking up in the Main Pressroom, third floor, c. mid-1960s**. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

Boredom was a significant factor for some of the Gov's employees, particularly in the latter decades of this period. Oral history testimony suggests that some workers did not feel that their skills and capacities were valued by management and that the work was beginning to 'dry up'. It is true that in the 1980s government departments were able to send out some of their printing jobs to the private sector (indeed, the Gov facilitated this), and at times some of the employees at the Ultimo plant felt that their workloads were becoming smaller. At this point it is worth noting that Government printing is necessarily irregular; the workloads are higher when Parliament is sitting and close to an election, and at non-sitting times there is less urgency for printed materials. As a consequence, there was sometimes very little for the employees to do.[49]

[49] Humphrey McQueen has noted that 'in the 1950s the need was to fill in spare time'. It could be said that the Gov is an extension of this pattern – right up to 1989. See H. McQueen (2001), 'Killing time: Alienation theories in an era of chronic under-employment and over work', Working Paper 72, Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research & Training, Sydney, p. 28. Archived at http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/22289/20011121-0000/www.econ.usyd.edu.au/acirrt/pubs/WP72.pdf, visited 21 January 2014.

As mentioned in the Introduction, it is not always possible to theorise the experience of the Gov's workers along straightforward Marxist lines of worker 'exploitation' because they are not necessarily producing surplus value from their labour. In fact, the pace of work could be very slow in some sections and at some times of year. This was partly due to the Gov's use of more traditional (letterpress-related) technologies, but also because of the work-ticket system. The work-ticket system is a common Taylorist factory time-management method that allocates certain amounts of time for particular tasks. At the Gov, however, the PKIU and other unions ensured that the time allowances were so reasonable, sometimes to the point of being unnecessarily long, that some workers found they could complete their tasks in half the allocated time. This would occasionally get them in trouble with the union, but it also allowed plenty of free time to engage in the aforesaid foreign orders, games, practical jokes and pranks.

Bookbinder Kim Cooper explained how the work-ticket system resulted in workplace games:

> You had a bit of time on your hands. You know, the union ran the place very strictly, and that's why, as I said, you know how you had 20 books and 20 hours to do it, you had to put that in [in your timesheet]. You couldn't put in 15 hours. Because you'd get in trouble from everybody else – all of the tradesies … The way it used to work: you would be given a task to do, 'This is what you have to do', and you would be given time, and you had to fill out your time sheet … But what actually used to happen is you'd be given a job, like, say, you were given 20 books to bind, you would get an hour per book. … But you'd finish them in ten [hours]. So you'd muck around all the time. We'd fly down the aisles, you'd get pallet trucks, you'd fly down there and have races down the aisles. Just heaps of rubbish like that.[50]

Sandra Elizabeth Stringer in Graphic Reproduction explained a similar situation, adding that by the late 1980s there was only a small amount of work going through her section, not enough to

[50] Kim Cooper, interview with author, 29 November 2011.

keep everyone busy. She felt that this section was full of talented people who were undervalued, and consequently they found other creative outlets to fill the time. Sandra said:

> It blew out to the point where you ended up <pause> the work that you were charging, if you did your work, you'd end up with a lot of time left at the end of it. With nothing to do. Technically, if you were a good, hard worker, sometimes you could get your work done by morning tea … *Anything*, even like lawn mower repairs, people just used to look for anything to do. <laughs> It was that bad.[51]

Understanding the work-ticket system enables us to see that in making foreign orders and in executing elaborate pranks, the Gov's employees were not necessarily being 'lazy' or putting off important government work. In fact, doing more than their allocated workload could produce tensions with union representatives, and some employees did not want to 'rock the boat' in that manner. But these were creative and intelligent people, they were restless and in need of something to do.

Tony Cliffe, also from Graphic Reproduction, described how this section of the Gov was filled with extra-curricular activities. Tony brought his own machinery in from outside, including an antique typewriter known as 'The Enigma' – used especially for foreign orders – and he even brought in a washing machine that he had purchased second-hand, to check whether it worked. When questioned by his boss, Tony explained that he had washed all of the rags, aprons, dustcoats and tea towels. Other workers in the Graphic Reproduction section pooled their money to purchase an elaborate slot-car track, which they installed in a spare room at the Gov.[52] Racing billy carts and galley trucks through the Gov was also a frequent pastime, as was cricket in the corridors and simply sitting and watching the trains in the Darling Harbour Goods Yard.

In the late 1950s, Despatch labourer George Bryant was 15 years old, and so poorly paid that he sometimes could not afford lunch. George found his moments when his fellow despatch

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[51] Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

[52] Recollections from Tony Cliffe, personal communication with author, 5 November 2013.

colleagues were having a lunch break in Sydney city:

> Lance always used to [go to] Circular Quay, where there was a [place he would] go and get his sandwiches. Every day, same thing: corn beef and beetroot. I can always remember that, you know. These are the things I had to remember a long time ago. Now listen, when these drivers used to pull up at these canteens, for their lunch or something. I didn't go in all the time, because I didn't have any money. You can see how much I was getting [£4 8s per week], and I'd give half of that to my Dad. And I didn't have any money, but I didn't let on, you know, like, I couldn't. They'd say, 'Come in', I'd say,
>
> 'Nah, nah, not today', you know? So when they went in, I knew they'd be in there for about 45 minutes. I used to take off in the truck, drive it round the city. I was only 15, but I had a good idea how to drive, because I used to go to work with me Dad, on the bus, and I used to watch him drive, and that's how I learnt. I took off round the city, in these vans and these trucks, and brought it back in time, before the drivers came out, and they didn't know any different … Except one day. I come back in Harrigan Street, down the city, near Circular Quay, there was this place we used to go to there, and I was comin' back and it just looked like the *Rocky* movie, you know when you had all the tins on the side of the thing? I did that, I come up and I knocked 'em all over … As I swung in, I knocked one, and the other four went, and it made a helluva noise![53]

Although George did not have access to machinery and materials in quite the same way as the tradesmen and apprentices, he too found ways to escape work and to improve his skills (in this case, driving trucks).

As stated previously, pranks and practical jokes have been a longstanding part of industrial labour in Australian factories, with the best repeated, year after year, across many industries,

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[53] George Bryant, interview with author, 28 September 2012.

usually targeted at unwitting first-year apprentices. Such pranks included telling a hapless apprentice to go to another section and ask for a 'long weight', or asking an apprentice to find a 'left-handed screwdriver'. The most interesting pranks at the Gov were grounded in the material specificity of the printing house. Apprentices were asked to fetch some 'red type', or mix up some 'striped ink'. Some apprentices were sent to the roof of the building to wait for the 'Hansard Priority Proof' to arrive by helicopter (of course, it never did). 'Radioactive highlight dots' were another repeated prank, involving fluorescent circular stickers. Kim Cooper explains:

> We sent one guy down to the basement, sent him down there to get the highlight dots. But [we] said they were 'radioactive', so he had to wear all this stuff. He had to have a welder's mask, put all these overalls on him, and everything else … So he gets down there and the guy down there gets them and he says,
> 'Now, you remember you've gotta hold them out in front like this because they're radioactive, you can't hold 'em close.' So he walks up, catches the lift, walks all the way through the bindery holding this thing out, and everyone's laughing their heads off. <laughs>[54]

While there is a light-hearted, jovial element to these practices, it is important to acknowledge that apprentice initiations could also be cruel, violent and sometimes humiliating, including sexual humiliation. People who were smaller, weaker or frail were frequently the butt of jokes at the Gov, and until the introduction of female apprentices, boy apprentices were often given initiations. Such practices were condoned as part of the 'traditional' culture of craft masculinity, as described in Chapter Four. Again, the practices are grounded in the material and physical specificity of the compositor's trade. Former compositor Geoff Hawes recalled:

> They used to do this thing where <pause> we used to work with this thing called wooden 'furniture', which is all around the pages … you'd get them in lengths like this, and cut 'em down to what you need … You'd be bendin' over, pickin' up a galley and then someone would come up

[54] Kim Cooper, interview with author, 29 November 2011.

> and whack you on the bum with it, as hard as they could. You know? Or you'd be trying to hold a page of type, right? And you'd try not to drop it, and then someone would go and put out a cigarette on your arm … You couldn't drop it. You're in agony. … They used to put Indian ink on parts of your body where you didn't want Indian ink, and then iron filings out of the saw box. Because when you cut the type filings would go there. They put that on top as well. It used to take two or three weeks to wear off … And that was just part of the initiation process.[55]

A more basic mistreatment for a new apprentice was to be picked up, covered in some kind of waste material (sometimes offset powder), bundled inside a large waste paper basket, with something heavy placed on top to prevent the victim's escape. Apprentices would later find they got in trouble for leaving their machinery unattended. Bodies, machines, printing materials and the tools of the trade were a constant part of these entrenched shop floor practices.

Fig. 109 **The Bat-Mobile, late 1980s**, designed and 'powered' by Jeff Keane and Leo Piplos, with some assistance from Tony Cliffe. Courtesy of Tony Cliffe.

[55] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.

Other pranks and schemes were more elaborate, one-off creative productions. One group of workers dressed up and performed as the Village People. A boss known as 'Big Zed' discovered that all of his furniture and paperwork had swiftly and mysteriously disappeared out of his office. 'Poor old Shuffles' couldn't find his locker anywhere and opened his umbrella to find it filled with confetti. Many workers were tricked by the 'wallet on a string'. The bookbinders built their own pool table and conducted tournaments. In the Graphic Reproduction Section, Jeff Keane and Leo Piplos designed and built a 'Bat-Mobile', dressing up in costume and 'driving' it around the Gov. [Fig. 109]

The Main Pressroom may have seemed like the hardened, mechanical side of the printing process, but press-machinists also turned their hands to extra creative endeavours. Press-machinist Glenn Mackellar tells the story of Leo Duncan's piano:

> [Leo Duncan and I] were printers together, and the large format letterpress machines were all laid out in a line. They were also, by today's standards, very slow, the running speed was approx. 1500 to 2000 sheets per hour, so … you effectively spent all day doing nothing except watching the press run. … We used to get pallets of paper – a pallet being a metre square by about a metre-and-a-half high – and it was wrapped in corrugated cardboard. The first thing you'd do, when you got a pallet of paper, you'd run a knife down the side. So you'd have these massive pieces of corrugated cardboard. … Anyway, one day Leo decided to get creative … [He] set to it, with a roll of sticky tape and a whole heap of this cardboard … he measured this thing up. He made a full-size piano out of corrugated cardboard! It was … really very good, you could immediately tell what it was as soon as you saw it! When no one was looking he pushed this thing out into the middle of the room, while all the machines were running, so it was quite noisy in there. With a Texta pen, he'd painted all the keys on. Anyway, he was sitting there, and all these people used to exit the lifts and walk through, and he'd be sitting there playing

> this imaginary piano, singing as loud as anything, 'Bonny River' <Glenn sings>. He'd be singing away on this piano. People used to think he was mad. It was hilarious but as usual the senior management didn't see the funny side and he was duly reprimanded for 'wasting government issue sticky tape and black marking pens' that he used to hold it together and paint the keys![56]

Creative pranks often operate in a way that counterbalances the authority division between overseers and tradespeople. Linotype operator Bob Law recalled a well-known compositors' trick: changing a person's details on the electoral roll. In this period, the electoral roll still listed a person's occupation.

> If there was an election coming up they might have to start the rolls six months beforehand. It was repetitious, it was just line after line of the person's surname, their Christian names, then male 'M', female 'F', their address and their occupation. We used to have a bit of fun with the occupations. <laughs> Just change 'em and see how long it took before it went through the process to be fixed … One printer spotted Ian F. Adamson's name in the section he was printing. Ian was the Controller of Printing and a truly lovely bloke, always good for a laugh. Well, the operator stopped the press, took out the line with 'Addo's' name on it, raced to the Linotype section, and had it reset with his occupation changed from 'Printer' to 'Dogcatcher'. That stayed the same for years, and my wife recently was able to look up electoral rolls, as part of her hobby of family history. I looked up [the] Hornsby Electoral roll for 1980 and, sure enough, it is listed there.[57]

Other oral history participants have similar anecdotes about changing occupation listings on the electoral roll. Members of the public were also victims of this ruse. A popular radio

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[56] Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011, follow up questions clarified 31 October 2013.

[57] Glenn MacKellar, personal communication with author, 31 October 2013.

DJ had his occupation changed to 'Confederate Soldier'. No one would admit to more defamatory occupation changes, but the possibilities were seemingly endless. Given the electoral roll is an official state document, the penalties for altering the listings could have been quite severe, although no compositors spoke to me about concerns in this regard. Here it is worthwhile remembering the tangibility of government information; each voter's name and occupation was recorded in physical form, in metal Linotype slugs, stored in standing formes in the Gov's basement. Thus the fundamental basis of these practical jokes was embedded within the object itself. With the increasing computerisation of government data, the possibility for this kind of tampering became more difficult, although not impossible.

Sandra Elizabeth Stringer explained how she and her colleagues delighted in devising pranks to trick their stern, old-fashioned overseer, Berdj Momdjian:

> Berdj had been carrying on that we were always late back from lunch, and he had given us all one of his pep-talks, and left us this particular day saying,
> 'When I come back from lunch tomorrow, I want to see everybody's smiling face looking back at me!'
> So we decided that we'd go around and take photos of everybody, and then go down into the photographers' darkroom, and we made life-size cut-outs of everybody. Berdj came back from lunch, and of course, you know, went to look at our tables and we're all sitting there in our cut-out forms. <laughs> So these life-size cut-outs of everybody had been kicking around for ages, you know. Anyway, they had one that was of me ... and somebody had stuck it up on the window looking out over the carpark, and they'd put this great big speech bubble: 'HELP!'
> Well, Berdj obviously didn't see the funny side of the cardboard cut-outs, you know, we were all having a bit of a go at him. He went bananas and made them all come down. But there was still this orange speech bubble, that said 'HELP!' on the outside of the Gov! <laughs> Of course,

> Clive Robertson's news crew flies past and you know, made up a big story about how they must be *really* desperate there, they're even putting signs on the outside! <laughs>[58]

This is a situation where Sandra and her co-workers made use of their graphic reproduction skills to make fun of their boss, but it is also a story that touches on the public perception of the Gov in the 1980s. Was it really getting that dire in there that the workers were putting signs up on the windows, calling for help? The staff thought this was hilarious, but it also suggests a general (and publicly known) sense of institutional decline at the Gov. This is explored in the following section.

Audits and industrial decline in the late 1980s

In 1985 some HSC examination papers were stolen from the Gov. The institution was facing both criticism in the media and heightened government scrutiny.[59] When Liberal Premier Nick Greiner won the NSW election in March 1988 the political climate turned increasingly towards policies of economic rationalism and industrial government operations were targets for potential closure.[60] The Gov was audited a number of times in the late 1980s. The first was in 1988 when Chris Ailwood was appointed to lead a working party to review the viability and efficiency of the organisation.[61] He was given an office at the Gov on the fifth floor and he remained on site for eight weeks.[62]

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58 Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with author, 17 October 2012.

59 P. Clark & M. Theobald (1985), 'HSC paper for sale, says Opposition', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, p. 3; T. Aubin & P. Clark (1985), 'Wran takes strong stand on theft of HSC exam papers', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November, p. 4; P. Totaro (1985), 'Call for modern security at Govt Printing Office', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November, p. 7; L. Costa (1985), 'New fear in HSC papers fiasco', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November, p. 2; '"Friends" blamed for HSC break-in' (1986), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May, p. 7.

60 M. Grealy (1988), '"Shape up" warning to state chiefs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October, p. 40.

61 The resulting report: C. Ailwood (1988), *The future for government printing*, NSW Department of Administrative Services, NSW Government, Sydney. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2109, NSW State Records, Kingswood,

62 NSW Government Printing Office (1988), *Staff Circular*, 22 August. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2109, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

Government Printer Don West was troubled by this audit, writing to the Minister of Administrative Services, Robert Webster:

> His [Ailwood's] use of figures is extravagant and adventurous and when used to support a singular line of otherwise unsupported argument could prove dangerous to you as Minister and to all concerned.[63]

For the staff, these strangers in suits wandering in the hallways seemed to be harbingers of the Gov's impending demise, and by December 1988 the Government Printer was well aware of the low staff morale. He wrote again to Robert Webster, expressing concern that Ailwood's audit had:

> … caused unease with employees, who are, in the main, dedicated, hardworking, loyal Public Servants and whom I believe should not be subject to the anguish they are currently experiencing.[64]

Recalling this period, press-machinist Anna Lyons said:

> After a while I just didn't enjoy it any more. And I knew – we all kinda knew – that we were gonna become redundant, because Darling Harbour was being built at that stage … and then we were saying,
> 'Oh, I wonder what they're gonna do with the building?'
> We didn't think much of it at first, but as it all started getting built. Then we heard murmurs. We had suits going through, so every now and then you'd have people – like five or eight or sometimes 10 – people came through the building. So, you're getting executives … I don't know who they were. Every now and then you'd see them going through. And then the rumours did start because they were going to do the wool sheds next door. They were slowly closing down anyway. So we could see things were going to happen, about two years before it actually did [close],

63 D. West (1989), 'Review of the Government Printing Office', notice to the Minister of Administrative Services, 19 January. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2109, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

64 D. West (1988), 'Concern over staff morale at the Government Printing Office', statement issued to the Minister of Administrative Services, December. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2109, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

> the rumours were so strong, it was hard to deny them … It was just dragging on before it closed.
> 'Oh, it's gotta close soon, it's gotta close soon!' and the morale was bloody going lower and lower, you could see, everywhere. Everyone was just biding their time.[65]

In April 1989 the state government appointed Australian Consulting Partners (ACP – Paul Collings and John Wylie) to undertake another economic viability study into the Gov.[66] The Combined Unions of the Government Printing Office told their members that this study should be an improvement on the previous audit and the 'consultants were very open in terms of what they are here for'.[67] The study was allegedly intended to consider the questions of market competition, long term strategy, technological improvements and moving and relocation options. The Combined Unions were informed in May 1989 that the ACP study would take three months. But on 27 June 1989 the workers were informed that the Gov was to close down in four weeks.[68]

In this declining, negative atmosphere of the late 1980s, employee attitudes sometimes shifted towards gallows humour, a sense that the ship was already sinking; it was a matter of how and when – not if – the Gov was going to close.[69] When making assessments about the motivations behind the production of foreign orders, an appreciation of this specific labour context is essential. In the following section we shall see how this practice changed over time. In the latter part of the 1980s at the Gov, the making of foreign orders experienced a shift, as unofficial publications became more specifically about the demise of the Gov itself, adding a fatalistic and political dimension to the making of foreign orders.

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65 Anna Lyons, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

66 Minister Robert Webster (1989), 'Appointment of consultants', letter to the members of the Combined Government Printing Office Unions, 10 May. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2111, NSW State Records, Kingswood. The resulting report: Australian Consulting Partners (1989), *Strategy review of the New South Wales Government Printing Office: Achieving efficient printing through appropriate technology and decentralisation*, for the NSW Government, Sydney.

67 Combined Unions of the Government Printing Office (1989), 'Review of G.P.O.: Consultants doing economic viability study', notice to members, May, Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2111, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

68 The aftermath of the closure announcement will be briefly addressed in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

69 M. Moore (1989), 'Cuts feared at Govt Printer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June, p. 8.

Foreign orders at the Government Printing Office

> Barry: Foreign orders <all laugh>
>
> *Neil: Yeah, a lot of that went on. A lot of the fancier sort.*
>
> Barry: Cost ya two beers! [70]

We do not normally think of public servants as creative people, but many at the Gov were, and they found themselves working in a bureaucratic labour system that did not always value their abilities, creative intelligence and interests. In the oral history process, print workers sometimes told me that they chose to undertake apprenticeships in the printing industry because it was the closest thing they could find to working in art or design. For workers who were engaged in visual ideas, being tasked with typesetting or printing tedious government publications, such as annual reports and volumes of regulations, could be a disappointing affair. With materials and time at their disposal, the collective work culture at the Gov silently endorsed the creation of extra printed products on the side.

Foreign orders at the Gov took many forms; they were objects and printed publications made by workers for private use, often for their friends, family or clubs and societies. As Geoff Hawes explains,

> Foreign orders, they were a daily occurrence at the Gov.
>
> Wedding invitations, business cards, invoice books, etc.[71]

Such items were not usually made for profit, although producing them at work meant that workers did not have to pay externally for printing services and materials. Foreign orders might include newsletters or certificates printed for a hobby group, letterheads for a friend's business or invitations for a children's birthday party. Cartoons and comics, produced by and distributed to staff were quite common, as were graphic posters – farewell gifts for departing workers.

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[70] Barry Skewes and Neil Lewis, interview with author, 17 January 2012.

[71] Geoff Hawes, personal communication with author, 31 October 2013.

Other unofficial objects had more practical purposes in the workplace, such as handmade tools and handmade wire cages to make machinery safer. Some foreign orders were tacitly endorsed by management, particularly if they were used to improve apprentice skills, or if managers also wanted something printed on the side. Nonetheless, the penalties for getting *caught* pilfering materials or producing foreign orders could be steep, and managers at the Gov did not officially condone such practices.

Lindsay Somerville recollected that the making of foreign orders was done with care and, moreover, it was motivated *by care*:

> When I was a young apprentice in the Jobbing Room we were doing Christmas cards for members of Parliament. The cards were very classy compared with the normal ones we worked on. So [we] got some for ourselves with our parents' names printed regally. I set the names on the Ludlow in Coronet, and … others printed them on the letterpress Heidelberg platen. Amazing how there were no overs when the job was completed for the MPs. We took great care not to damage any when doing the make-ready for the press so we could get as many cards as possible for all of us.[72]

This indicates that sometimes the makers of foreign orders had fairly benign intentions, and it could be done in such a way that it did not over-use existing materials intended for official jobs.

The most controversial foreign order incident at the Gov involved the production (and attempted on-sale) of fishing sinkers made from the hot-metal lead alloy in typesetting. This metal was, at the time, quite expensive (prior to the obsolescence of hot-metal typesetting).[73] While no participants spoke in detail to me about this particular story, one former employee acknowledged:

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[72] Lindsay Somerville, personal communication with author, 31 October 2013.

[73] An alloy of lead, tin and antimony.

> There were some guys that were making sinkers for fishing from the metal we used to make our type from. It was so big I was told that the police were called in.[74]

Not all workers supported the making of foreign orders. In the oral history interviews I conducted, some included the practice of foreign orders as one of the things that was wrong with the Gov. They contributed to an inefficient work environment and added fuel to outside claims that the Gov was a 'waste of taxpayers' money'. Former compositor and designer George Woods said:

> Now, sometimes I'd go in there, and unfortunately I'd find that the guys would've been doing a foreign order on equipment that was worth millions of dollars. It's a shame … some people wouldn't want to admit that.[75]

Likewise, former compositor John Lee saw it this way:

> Oh, well, they used to help themselves to anything they wanted. You know, that was considered part of the job. Foreign orders and jobs for sporting clubs or whatever was considered a necessity.[76]

He later added,

> You said gilding the lily? Well, with the foreign orders that went on there, they were gilding quite a bit more than the lily, and with gold leaf, that was even expensive back then.[77]

As we have seen, this chapter has identified a number of different motivations for practicing foreign orders. This includes worker resistance, but foreign orders also had the social purpose of encouraging collective solidarity and loyalty. They were sometimes generated for apprentice training, and simply for the pleasure of making things using hand skills. They were also produced

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[74] Anon., personal communication with author.

[75] George Woods, interview with author, 21 February 2012.

[76] John Lee, interview with author, 2 August 2012.

[77] John Lee, personal communication with author, 6 December 2013.

for practical needs on the shop floor or for family members and they were part of the ongoing reproduction of workplace folk culture.

We have seen how the practice of foreign orders was a secretive practice, designed to operate not as an overt industrial action, but as a subtle undercutting and carving out of small moments of autonomy in a frequently mundane working environment. The practice of foreign orders did not disrupt the working environment; rather, it enabled workers to eke out something for themselves in a working context. But what happened when that world of work was profoundly disrupted and drew to a close? At the point when the very existence of the Gov seemed on the cusp of collapse, the practice of foreign orders (as well as pilfering) experienced a change. It became more political, more overt and more widespread.

As mentioned earlier, one popular form of foreign order was the production of posters, comics or cards to farewell a departing workmate. Anteby has confirmed that the practice of gifting a foreign order to a worker upon retirement was a widespread one.[78] In the Graphic Reproduction section at the Gov, workers sometimes collaborated on photographic and hand-drawn collages, often featuring satirical representations of the institution, such as an irreverent but bleak representation of a sinking ship, or a lumbering dinosaur of former print industry times. [Figs. 107, 110–11] These collage posters were not simply a cut-and-paste job, they were often produced with film and the work could be detailed and time-consuming.

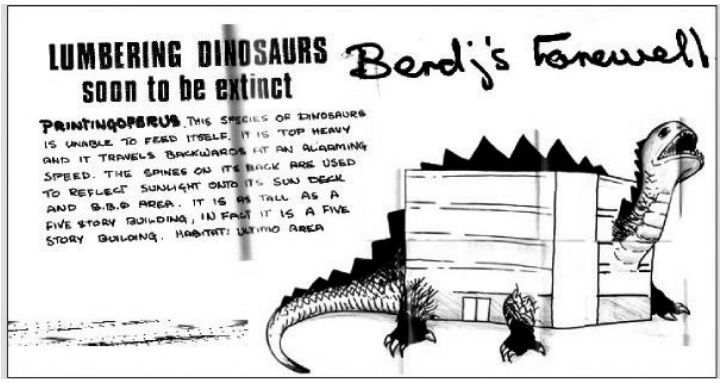

Fig. 110 **Farewell illustration for Overseer Berdj Momdjian**, depicting the Government Printing Office as a soon to be extinct dinosaur, the *Printingoferus*, c. late 1980s. Courtesy of Sandra Elizabeth Stringer.

[78] M. Anteby, 'Factory "homers"', p. e24.

Fig. 111 **Farewell illustration for Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, 1988–1989**, depicting the staff members of the Graphic Reproduction Section. Courtesy of Sandra Elizabeth Stringer.

By the late 1980s there was a mounting sense that the Gov was indeed a sinking ship or a critically endangered dinosaur and it was only a matter of time before its closure would be announced. Some employees pre-emptively sought work elsewhere. Sandra Elizabeth Stringer left a few months before the closure to take up a position at Sydney Technical College. Her colleagues cheerfully farewelled her with a printed illustration that reads, 'They say rats are always the first to desert a sinking ship'. [Fig. 111]

In this late 1980s period, the making of foreign orders became subtly politicised and more about the Gov itself. The practice also became more blatant and unconcealed, as workers increasingly felt they had nothing to lose. This is best exemplified by the graphical works of Tony Cliffe, whose illustrated satirical stories were shown to me by a number of interview participants. Interview participants tended to present Tony's work as evidence of 'how things really were' at the Gov; this was often presented as *their* version of an institutional history. While Tony himself is more humble about the purpose of these satirical renderings, his work provides an important critical perspective from a worker, offering a view of how well the employees understood the decline and closure of their workplace. The fact that other workers identified with Tony's illustrations and presented in their interviews is important; it is partly what gives his work meaning.

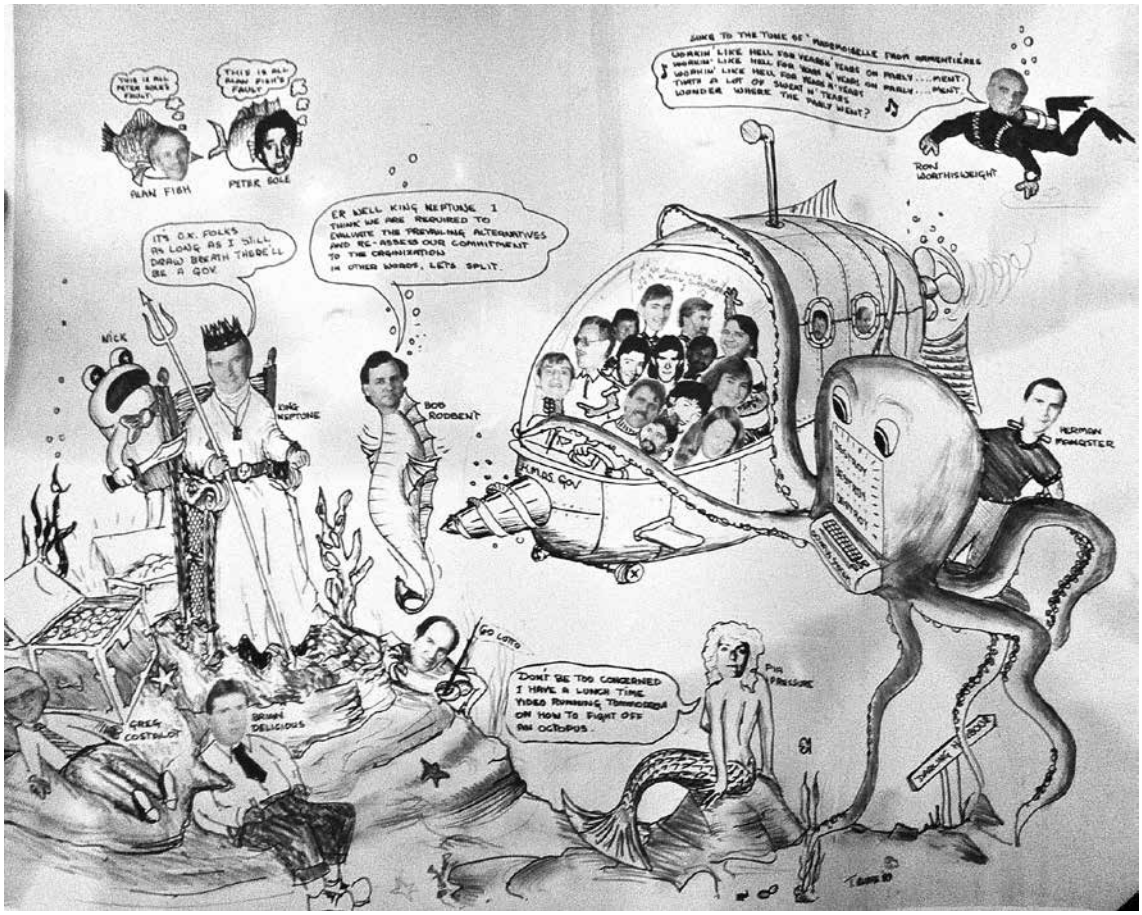

Fig. 112 **Aquatic scene of imminent danger, 1989**, unauthorised poster by Tony Cliffe. Dimensions: approx. 100 cm wide. Courtesy of Ray Utick, with the permission of Tony Cliffe.

In the first half of 1989, Tony Cliffe produced a large 'under the sea' poster, combining hand-drawn and photographic elements, satirising the impending demise of the Gov. [Fig. 112] The poster is large (around 1m wide) and printed on archival-quality paper and is now seen as a rare collector's item by those ex-employees who collect such ephemera. The image is filled with looming threats. The Government Printer Don West is depicted as King Neptune, regally assuring everyone that everything is going to be OK while 'Kermit' (Premier Nick Greiner) is standing behind him wielding a knife. The sense that computerisation was partly to blame for the decline of the Gov is also referenced, with the 'Optimus' computer system depicted as a giant predatory octopus attacking 'HMAS Gov'. (Admittedly, Optimus was simply a computer database system for recording printing jobs, but the broad symbolism remains.) Particular stakeholders are depicted blaming each other; the management fish (Alan Fisher) blames the union, while the union fish (Father of the

Chapel Peter Soley) blames management. An arrow points towards the newly redeveloped Darling Harbour.

At around the same time, Tony also produced a 12-page illustrated satirical publication, typed on the Enigma. The booklet is titled *The Government Printing Office: A paradise lost* and it is purportedly written by an unfortunately-named worker, 'Ivor Gottnowerk'.[79] The publication was meant to be a rough draft, but Tony explained that the closure of the Gov was publicly announced while he was working on the book and so he rushed to complete and print it in the four weeks before it closed.[80] *A paradise lost* tells the story of the Gov, explaining the reasons for the institution's decline. The book starts:

> Once upon a time (about 1975) in a far off universe on a planet called earth, was situated in the suburb of Ultimo, a place called the Government Printing Office. About 1200 people worked at this place. Approx 20 of them were bosses, five were cleaners, 1153 were productive staff, leaving about 10 people who were thought to be doing nothing at all. But they were happy and they all worked overtime two nights and Saturdays.[81]

The staff numbers here are only slightly exaggerated, and it is true that in the 1970s workers tended to endorse the scheme in which were they were paid low wages, but they could make up for it with overtime on two nights and Saturdays. This was one of the policies that Don West sought to transform, as he considered it inefficient.

A paradise lost also presents the claim that the Gov grew top-heavy and increasingly bureaucratic over time. The booklet lists many of the reforms made by management in the later years, including the creation of new departments and sections, the appointment of more managers and the painting of yellow safety lines around machinery. The 'top-heavy' claim was repeated to me

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[79] T. Cliffe (1989), *The Government Printing Office: A paradise lost, by Ivor Gottnowerk*, self-published at the NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney. For a digitised version of this publication: https://sites.google.com/site/nswgpoparadiselost.

[80] Tony Cliffe, personal communication with author, 5 November 2013.

[81] T. Cliffe, op. cit., p. 2.

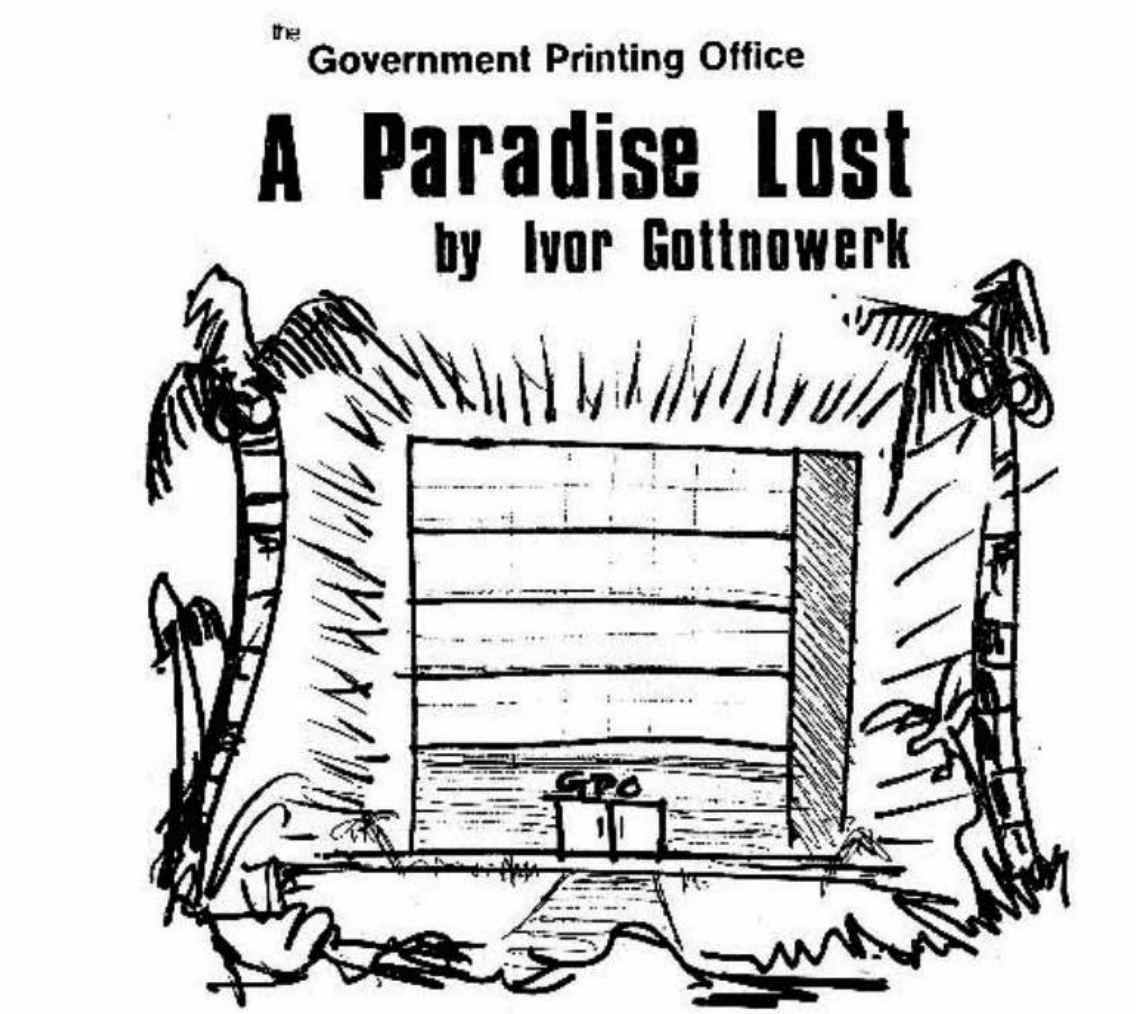


Fig. 113 **Front page of *A paradise lost***, 12-page foreign order booklet by Tony Cliffe, 1989. Reproduced with the permission of Tony Cliffe.

by a number of interview participants and it indicates that their experience of the public service management reforms in the 1970s is often framed in negative terms. The book reads:

> Some time later (like in about 1985) it was noticed that overtime became less and less frequent. It didn't make people happy. It was a mystery, one worker even went so far as to say that he thought the printing office was becoming top heavy with bosses and administrative staff, and that this was causing the printing office to charge its customers too much for their jobs. The idea was immediately dismissed as the ramblings of a lunatic and another three sections were created to overcome the problem.[82]

[82] ibid., p. 7.

The Gov building is frequently represented in section, which recalls the section drawings of the Gov detailed in Chapter Three, and it is treated as a container within which the politics and implicit hierarchies are represented and literally played out. Technologies are also implicated as symbols of 'old' and 'new' worlds of work:

> Slowly the presses ground to a halt, there was no one to operate them … Immediately a new section was formed to implement the installation of a computer, along with a section to re-train the staff as computer operators. Everyone was happy for a while, they had a new toy …[83]

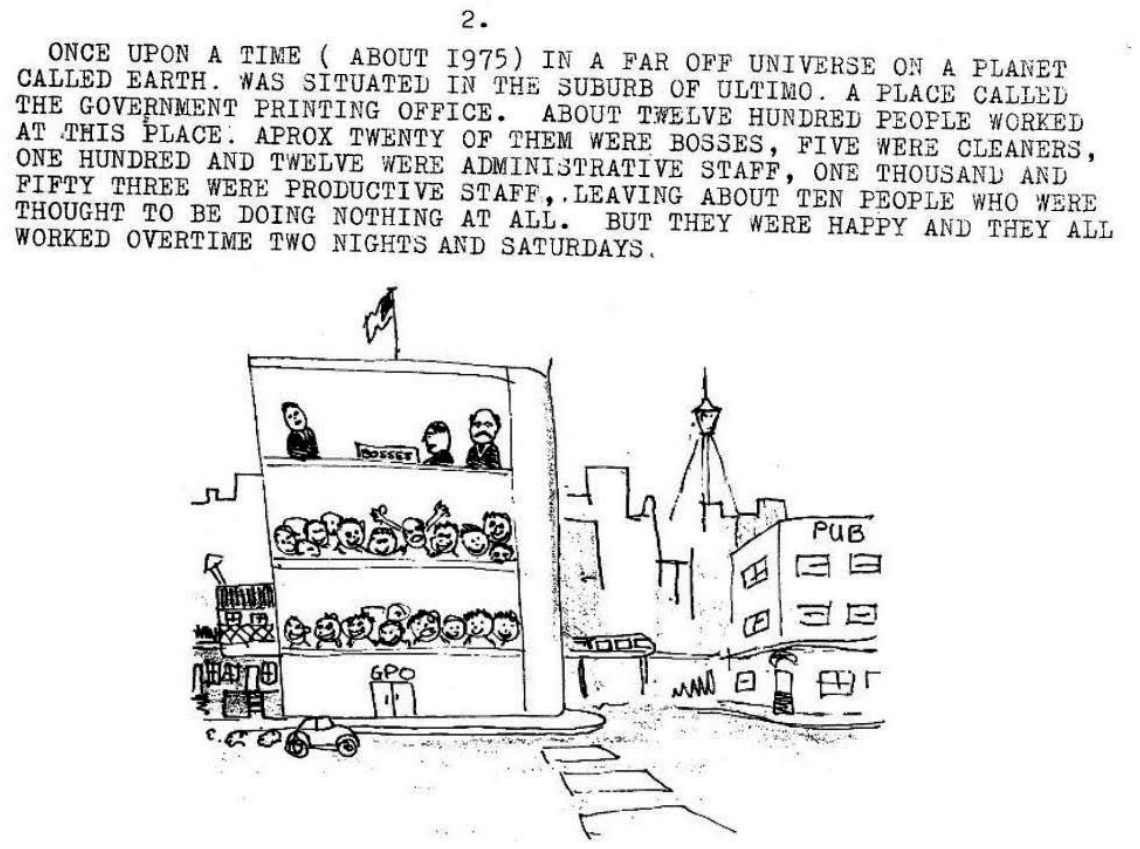
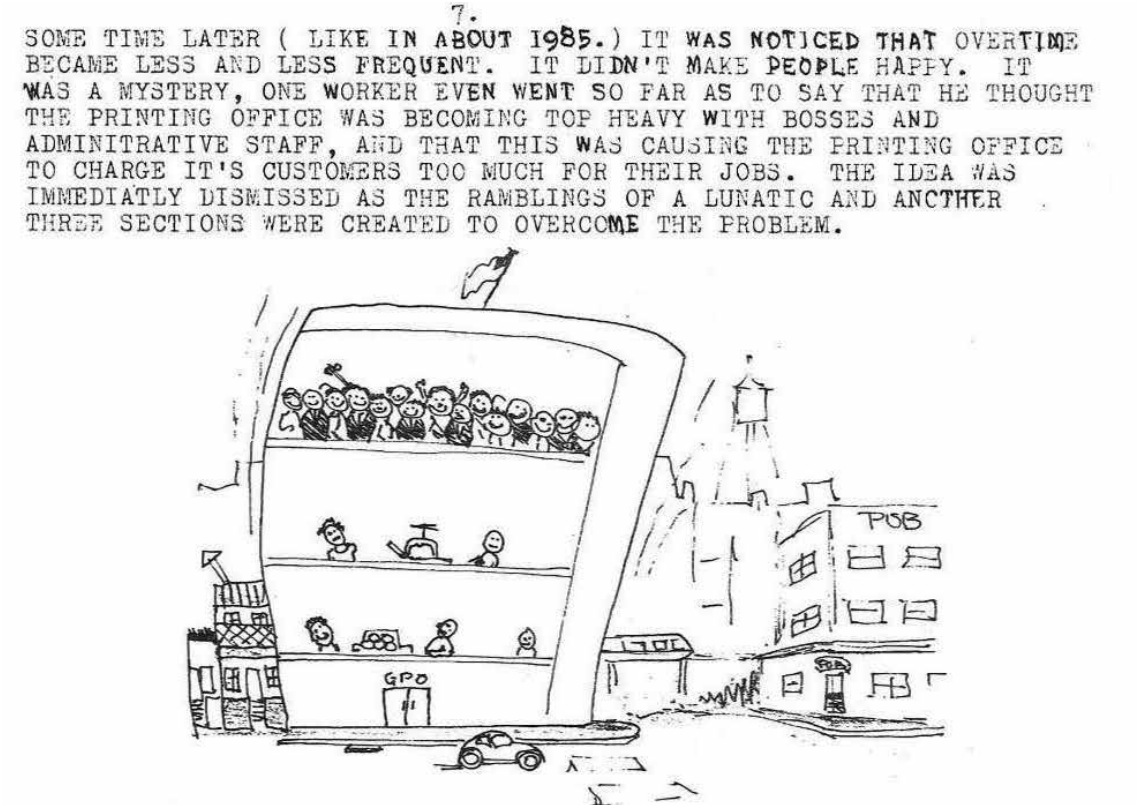


Fig. 114 **p. 2 of** ***A paradise lost.***

[83] ibid., p. 9.


7.

SOME TIME LATER (LIKE IN ABOUT 1985.) IT WAS NOTICED THAT OVERTIME BECAME LESS AND LESS FREQUENT. IT DIDN'T MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY. IT WAS A MYSTERY, ONE WORKER EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT HE THOUGHT THE PRINTING OFFICE WAS BECOMING TOP HEAVY WITH BOSSES AND ADMINITRATIVE STAFF, AND THAT THIS WAS CAUSING THE PRINTING OFFICE TO CHARGE IT'S CUSTOMERS TOO MUCH FOR THEIR JOBS. THE IDEA WAS IMMEDIATLY DISMISSED AS THE RAMBLINGS OF A LUNATIC AND ANOTHER THREE SECTIONS WERE CREATED TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEM.

Fig. 115 **p. 7 of *A paradise lost*.**

In a somewhat predictable moral development of the storyline, the booklet reminds the reader that 'computers didn't save the Govt Printing Office'.[84] *A paradise lost* goes on to describe how the Gov 'became so unproductive and uneconomical that it was decided to close the place down'.[85] The question of ideology versus economic reality is key here. In many senses, the claims made in *A paradise lost* are true; although the Government Printing Office introduced electronic computer typesetting in order to 'catch up' with the rest of the printing industry, this embrace of new technologies did not save the institution from the results of neo-liberal political policy and the broader economic impacts of a globalised printing market. It is questionable whether the introduction of corporate management structures in the 1970s and 1980s really caused the Gov to close. The matter is more complex and the conclusion of this dissertation will briefly look at the reasons given for the Gov's demise, and the human and material impacts of the closure. For now, we can say that *A paradise lost* offers valuable insights into workers' experiences of industrial decline and into the way in which they see and interpret events over an extended period of time.

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[84] ibid., p. 10.

[85] ibid., p. 10.

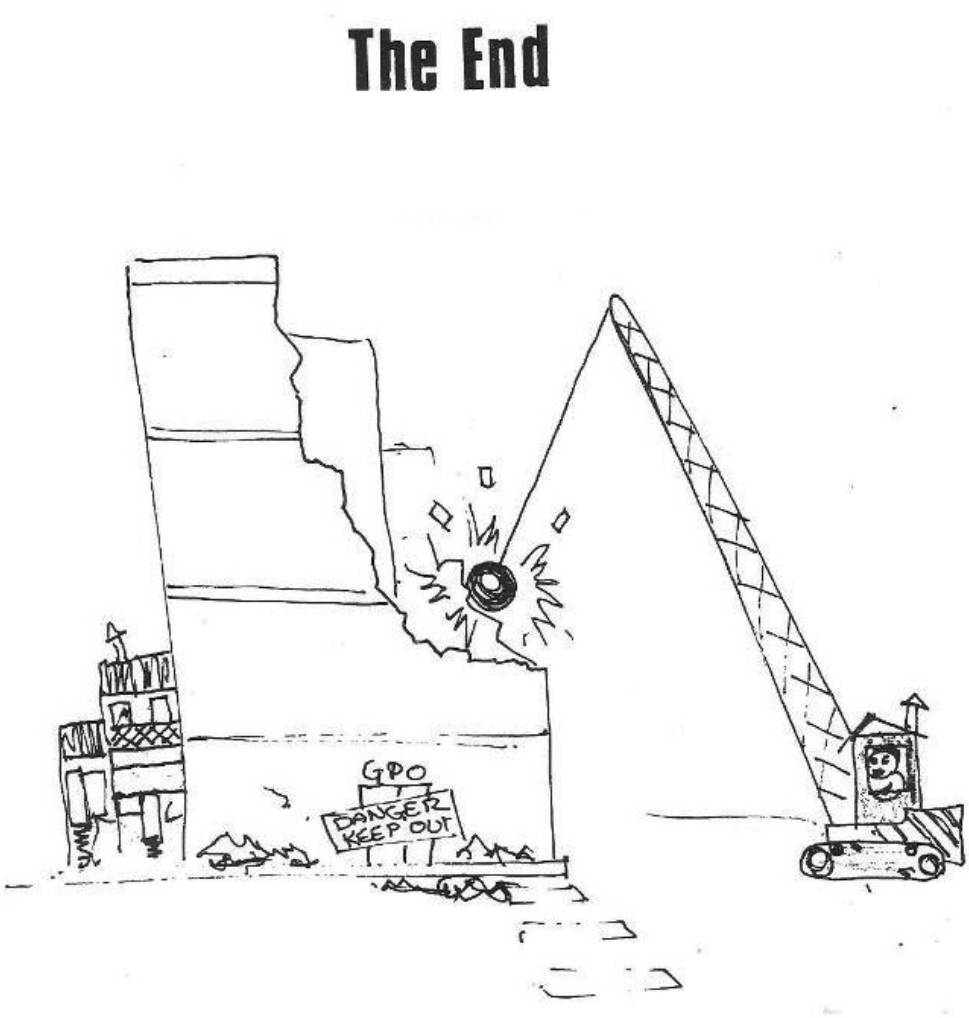

Fig. 116 **Penultimate page of *A paradise lost*.**

After the announcement on 27 June 1989 that the Gov would be closing in four weeks, printed copies of *A paradise lost* were distributed to staff in a relatively open, public manner. Here we have a foreign order that moved from the quiet fringes of labour into a collective awareness. It became a fatalistic telling of a story in which everyone had a part. *A paradise lost* operated within a world that was broken and it sought to explain the loss of that world to those who were most affected by it. While *A paradise lost* may not offer a definitive explanation of why the Government Printing Office was terminated, it narrates the workers' experiences in their own terms and it does so in a satirical manner, rather than with a heavy hand.

The looming threat of privatisation and the growing significance of globalised late-capitalist markets was something that the workers had laboured under for many years. Cheap printing resources increasingly opened up in Asia. The Gov's role as a service department came to be less valued and it was asked to 'produce a profit'. Workers were not oblivious to these political and economic changes and this awareness appears in quiet ways: the back page of *A paradise lost* contains the standard inscription that we find on the back of all government publications, the name of the government printer, centred on the page. In the mid-twentieth century NSW residents had grown accustomed to seeing the inscription 'Government Printer D. West' or 'Government Printer V.C.N. Blight' on the back of any government publication. In *A paradise lost*, the final page includes a crossed-out inscription to D. West and a new inscription listing the media tycoon 'R. Murdoch, Govt Printer'.

10. Conclusion

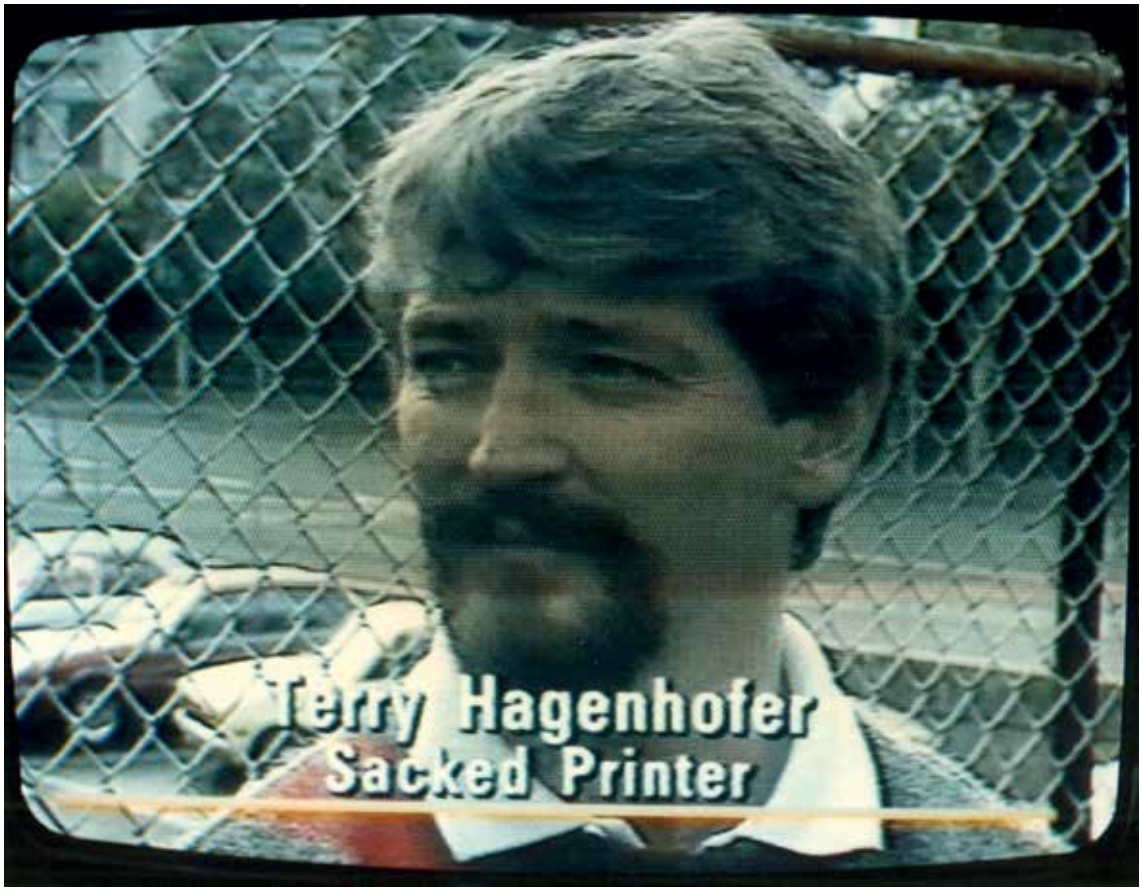

Fig. 117 **Terry Hagenhofer, 1989,** television interview captured in photograph of TV screen, after the announcement of the closure of the Government Printing Office. Photograph by Ray Utick, reproduced with permission.

The closure of the Government Printing Office

> Everything just sorta floated out.[1]

For a brief period in the mid-1980s it seemed as if the NSW Government Printing Office could have made the leap into a new reformed era, characterised by equal employment opportunity, diversity, a retrained workforce and cutting-edge computing and printing technologies. As we saw in Chapter Four, letterpress printing was phased out, offset-lithography was introduced with relative ease and the dominant culture of the Main Pressroom had incorporated offset-lithography into its ethos. Chapters Five and Six explored how hot-metal compositors were retrained in electronic photo-typesetting and some compositors became quite adept at computer programming, although many were saddened to see the termination of their compositing craft. Women, having been employed in more professional capacities since 1974, found their presence was no longer perceived as novel and, though they continued to face workplace challenges, by the late 1980s they were accepted as printing apprentices alongside men. With renovations to the Gov's public entrance, led by Pamela Pearce's Marketing team in the mid-1980s, the Gov looked to be facing the future from a more client-focused and commercially-oriented position.

Notwithstanding these reforms, other factors influenced the institution's fate. Land values, which had previously been very low in the former industrial slum of Ultimo, surged with the revitalisation of the adjacent Darling Harbour and the land on which the Government Printing Office stood became more valuable than the institution itself.[2] In the late 1980s managers at the Gov were investigating options to move the factory to another site in western Sydney, but Don West never had the chance to execute this move. By the end of July 1989, the NSW Government Printing Office had ceased to exist, abolished entirely by NSW Premier Nick Greiner's state government.

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[1] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[2] M. Laurence (1985), 'Golden fleece in historic woolstore', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September; D. West (1984), 'Briefing notes in respect to proposal for the relocation of the Government Printing Office', briefing note from the Government Printing Office to the Minister of Administrative Services, 29 August. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2101, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

Ironically, it was precisely a year before, in July 1988, that a German Bielomatik exercise-book machine had been delivered to Australia for installation at the Gov.[3] It remained in storage and it never made it to Ultimo; the closure was announced before the machine could be moved. This large machine-in-limbo held potent meaning for those concerned about the Gov's impending demise. A media report in June 1989 speculated that the Bielomatik's indeterminate state was 'a clear sign that the future for the operation was not good'.[4] After the closure, it took some months to sell it on to another purchaser; this large and expensive machine proved difficult to shift and was an unwieldy and niggling reminder of the messy ruthlessness of the Gov's abolition.

The axe fell swiftly. On 27 June 1989 a letter from the Department of Administrative Services was issued to all employees of the Government Printing Office, advising them that 'the Government has decided to close the Ultimo factory … effective four weeks from today'.[5] The Combined Unions of the Government Printing Office were never consulted and the Government Printer himself was shocked by the swiftness of the decision. Employees were offered standard redundancy packages, a small number of workers were redeployed in other parts of the NSW public service and the NSW Government Printing Service (GPS) was established two months later, in September 1989. Its role was mainly as a print broker, managing government tenders put out to private printers. It managed the publication of the *NSW Government Gazette*, but other publications were delegated to the NSW Parliamentary Counsel's Office.[6]

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[3] Bielomatik Book Press Model P.15–90B.

[4] M. Moore (1989), 'Cuts feared at Govt Printer', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June, p. 8.

[5] G. Messiter (1989), Letter to employees of the NSW Government Printing Office, Secretary of the Department of Administrative Services, NSW Government, 27 June. See also M. Moore (1989) 'Government axes 700 more jobs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June, p. 3.

[6] The GPS was abolished in 2002 and replaced by CM Solutions (Communications Management Solutions), an agency that resulted from the amalgamation of State Mail, the GPS and the Government Information Service. CM Solutions was dissolved in 2005 and the responsibility for government publications (which were swiftly becoming digitised) was handed to the company Salmat Document Management Solutions. See NSW Public Service Notices (1989), 6 September, p. 6; NSW Public Service Notices (1989), 13 September, p. 4; *NSW Government Gazette* (1992), 2nd edition, pp. 34–35; See also NSW State Records, Administrative history note, http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Entity.aspx?Path=%5CAgency%5C1154, visited 9 February 2013.

The rationale for the closure was explained in financial terms. In short, the cost of technological updates and relocation to another site proved too expensive for the government to contemplate and the commercial market allegedly offered more competitive prices for the government's printing requirements. In the aforementioned letter to staff, the Government Printing Office was specifically compared to commercial printeries:

> In order to compete equally with the printing services available in the private-sector, a reduction of $18m per annum in operating expenses would be necessary.[7]

As Don West observed, a straight comparison with the private sector was hardly fair, because of the way in which the Gov was expected to service and prioritise the Parliament's needs, and because of the specialist work the Gov undertook in document management and typesetting for complex government documents. Others saw the closure in ideological terms. The Labor Party's Geoff Irwin, who was opposition spokesman on Administrative Services in mid-1989, said:

> The government is so hung up on ideology, it is set to privatise even the most profitable enterprises. The Government Printing Office is almost completely self-funding.[8]

Don West had previously argued in defence of the Government Printing Office, writing to Minister for Services Robert Webster to explain the distinction between the Gov and commercial ventures:

> The particular requirements of working within Government result in a working environment and operating constraints which have to be met but which mitigate against being directly competitive with private printing organisations.[9]

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[7] G. Messiter, op. cit.

[8] M. Moore, 'Cuts feared at Govt Printer', op. cit.

[9] D. West, 'Concern over staff morale', op. cit.

When I interviewed him in 2012, Don again defended the Gov and complained that the Australian Consulting Partners' study[10] was a simplistic approach:

> They didn't really do the research into what the Printing Office did, who it serviced, or what its levels of service were, they just took a bit of paper and went down the street to another printer and said,
> 'How much would it cost to print that?' you know?
> And the other printer looked at it and said,
> 'Oh, well, we'll do that for 50 cents a copy, or something.'
> What he didn't know, was that there was 1000 hours work in that to get it to that point before you printed it! And that related back to all these things we did for the Parliament, etc.[11]

Always the pragmatist, Don rationalised the closure in this way:

> Greiner was Premier. They made a declaration that the government was going to close down a number of government industrial operations. And <pause> what they all were I don't know, but we were on that list … At the end of the day, when it came to 1989 and Greiner decided to pull the plug, they really had no understanding of what the Printing Office was doing, or what it was worth, or where it stood as a competitor in the industry. It just <pause> it was a political decision and that was the end of it, you know?[12]

The phrase 'the writing was on the wall' was frequently used during interviews, usually without a great deal of explanation; it is a statement that is easy to say in retrospect. Some workers argued that the Gov was indeed inefficient, and that it was a waste of taxpayers' money. As per Tony Cliffe's *A paradise lost*, others explained that the organisation had grown 'top heavy' with a white-collar, bureaucratic class of workers and this managerial complexity had complicated the simple

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[10] See Chapter Nine for discussion of the two audits of the Government Printing Office in 1988 and 1989.

[11] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

[12] ibid.

systems that had existed at the Gov earlier in the century. Some rationalised the closure by asserting that Premier Nick Greiner had a personal hatred for the Printing Office. Others used technologically deterministic arguments, saying that computers 'took over' the printing industry and that the Gov 'couldn't keep up' with the relentless forward push of technology.

None of these reasons entirely explain the circumstances surrounding the closure. Socio-political events such as these are complex and difficult to distil. Yes, the Gov's closure was essentially a political decision, but whether or not the demise of the organisation was 'inevitable' is still open to debate. In this particular analysis of the Gov I have eschewed technologically determinist and singularly political readings and, as stated in the Introduction, I am not concerned with laying blame. It can be said, however, that the social, material and administrative consequences of the closure continue to impact on the way in which the Printing Office is remembered and discussed. During their interviews former employees expressed frustration, sadness and a sense of loss about the way in which the Gov closed down. Some were still quite bitter about the events of 1989 and these negative feelings sometimes coloured the participants' statements about their former workplace.[13]

The day of the closure was a distinct memory for many interview participants. Small details are still retained in the telling. Alan Leishman said:

> We knew it was hard. We didn't know it was done for! Nobody really believed that they were just going to close the place down like that. I never had any feeling that the job there was in any way in danger … And the day it happened was quite amazing. I was waiting to see the Government Printer and he didn't come in. He didn't come in. And at 11 o'clock he came in and he had a ski jacket on, and that was something he'd never done before … Always wore suits. Never seen him in anything

[13] This emotive content is something that I have taken into account when analysing and selecting quotations from oral history interviews. It is also a valuable indicator of how significant the closure was for some former employees, particularly those who had worked there for several decades.

like it. Came in, and went into his office. And at about 12 o'clock they called us in and said,

'This is it, we're closed in four weeks'.[14]

Terry Hagenhofer [Fig. 117] spoke of his reaction to the closure. The long-term employees – who had undertaken their apprenticeships as teenagers at the Gov in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – felt betrayed by the institution to which they had been loyal for so long.

I was devastated. Yeah. The experience was just <pause> I suppose you know it was just out of the blue. *We'd had assurances*. Webster was the Minister at the time, [and there had been] assurances there'd be no sackings at the Government Printing Office! It would be a natural attrition, as people left, 'till they whittled it down to a more manageable staff rate. And then they just came walking around, I can remember where I was sitting. I was doing some scheduling and a guy walked up and said, 'Don't even bother doin' that mate, we're closed in six weeks.'

I said, 'What are you talkin' about?' and he said,

'It's just come though, we're closing, they've closed the place down.'

And it was just <pause> just sat there. <pause> Because I <pause>

I'd grown up there. From when I was 16. I was there 17 years.[15]

Press-machinist Norm Rigney felt similarly bereft:

My heart. You've got no idea how I felt. <sigh> I don't know. Even now you know, 20-odd years after, I really feel awful about that. The way everything went at the end. <sigh> … I cried when they closed the place down … After I got over it, I put my pen down and I couldn't believe what had happened and I never picked it up again. I never picked it up.[16]

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[14] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[15] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011.

[16] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012.

Kim Cooper, who at the time was working in production planning, remembered being shocked on the day:

> It was a sudden thing. One day they just said,
> 'Everybody up to the Canteen, there's a meeting on.'
> So we all went up to the Canteen, and they just said that they were closing it down. It was like, what? … So everyone's just walked down and gone, 'My God!' … There must have been three or four weeks after that date that the actual closure occurred. And during that time, oh, the pilfering, it was absolutely terrible! Everything went out the door. One guy started a print business after that, I think he got everything! I think he even got a machine out, a print machine. He just took bits off. Got big bags, you know? Computers, everything went out. Heaps of pilfering. But you would expect that, I suppose.[17]

Press-machinist Glenn MacKellar spoke of the long four weeks between the announcement and the actual closure of the factory. As with Kim's statement above, the imminence of material objects is ever-present in the verbal telling and again, as in Chapter Four, we see how the presses are centre stage in the workers' stories. With nothing left to do, Glenn and his colleagues cleaned up their old machines, preparing them to be sold on:

> I don't know why they decided to give people a month's notice. Maybe there were some people tidying things up, but there was just nothing to do! There was no work to be done. We just sort of <pause> a few of us got together and wiped the machines down, because we thought they'll auction this equipment off. Hope it goes to a good home. So we just cleaned the equipment up, and fiddled about. That was about it, really, but no one really did anything … Just nothing. Knocked everything off, mostly. Everything that wasn't bolted down got nicked.[18]

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[17] Kim Cooper, interview with author, 29 November 2011.

[18] Glenn MacKellar, interview with author, 1 December 2011.

During their interviews, many workers spoke of the pilfering and theft that took place after the closure was announced.[19] It is important to emphasise that these incidences of pilfering should not be judged simply as immoral or unethical. There was a generalised feeling that these workers had been cheated of job security and that their union had not been consulted. No attempt at negotiation had taken place. In addition, workers had a fair idea that many items would be thrown away or sold off in lots. In mid-1989, in the prevailing moral economy of the Gov, the material remnants of their doomed organisation were fair game; such actions seemed justifiable and right.

In a similar way to a family dealing with a deceased estate, fights broke out over particular objects, over who would take what. Norm Rigney spoke to me of the regret he felt, fighting with other workers over some of the weights from the Gov's gymnasium:

> We had a Staff Association meeting, and we sold off the gym equipment, for 10 cents a pound. I bought a heck of a lot of it, which I've still got. We took it home, in a mate's trailer and I remember one of the fellows from the photo section who used to go up there, Terry Hagenhofer, used to go up to the gym. And he's there and he's,
> 'Normy, what are you doin', you're takin' all that?' and I said,
> 'I bought it!' And I'm fightin' him off the trailer as the car's backin' out from the dock. I'm embarrassed about that, I really am embarrassed.
> (But I still have got the equipment that I bought.) …
> Even now you know, 20-odd years after, I really feel awful about that.
> The way everything went at the end … I'm embarrassed because Terry and I were pretty good friends and everything, but I was fightin' him off.
> It just got to dog-eat-dog in those <drifts off> It was dreadful. I know blokes that stole printers (computer printers).[20]

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[19] On 13 July 1989 a notice was issued to staff stating: 'Unfortunately some people tend to apply the term "personal belongings" rather liberally, and several pieces of equipment, including a computer keyboard have been removed illegally.' Again, those items of 'uncertain ownership' were understandably ripe for the picking in the eyes of disgruntled workers. See 'Removal of personal belongings' (1989), *Staff Circular*, internal document, NSW Government Printing Office, 13 July. Held at GPO General Correspondence Files #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

[20] Norm Rigney, interview with author, 30 January 2012.

Disorganised environments can of course produce petty squabbles, but what is more significant is the way in which the workers seized the opportunity to take what they felt was rightfully theirs, as a way of compensating themselves for the betrayal of trust by their employers, the government. Objects were at the centre of this story of decline and industrial closure. It is not simply that objects became connected to memory. In this industrial closure, material culture both stirred feelings and consoled people who felt they had not been respected by the institution to which they had been loyal.

The speed, ruthlessness and lack of planning with which the Gov was closed had serious impacts for some former employees and many government departments lost print material that was in production.[21] While the commercial printing sector naturally welcomed the change,[22] the closure led to state-wide industrial action, with stoppages in the public transport, schools, prisons and other public sectors.[23] And while most former employees eventually found jobs after June 1989, some never returned to the printing industry.

The abolition of the Gov was also mismanaged in the sense that the 'clean up' before the doors closed in late July 1989 was badly planned. Terminating a printing operation is never an easy affair – print machinery and paper are extremely heavy to move – but the matter is made more complicated when it involves a factory that produces essential government publications. As with the familiar and sometimes overwhelming experience of moving house, the closure of a factory puts the tangible and disorderly presence of material objects at centre stage. This was a seven-storey building filled to the brim with machinery, tools, furniture, paper and materials. Here was an unruly abundance of objects, difficult and cumbersome relics of an industrial past. Workers took what they could and dispersed. Those workers who were left – a small core of employees

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[21] The NSW Industrial Commission's Justice Bauer was highly critical of the State Government's treatment of the closure, stating that the government ignored social planning responsibilities and did not give enough notice. See A. Larriera (1989), 'CBD mail row resolved', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July, p. 7; A. Larriera (1989), 'Sackings by Government anti-social, says Judge', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July, p. 5.

[22] 'Closure of NSW Govt. Printer welcomed' (1989), *PATEFA News Bulletin*, vol. 11, no. 7, July, p. 1.

[23] A. Catalano & G. Cantlon (1989), ' "Day of outrage" threat to shut down Sydney', *Sun Herald*, 8 July, p. 3; A. Larriera (1989), 'Printers' pay claim rejected', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July, p. 9; 'Government Printing Office closed: For private profit not public need' (1989), *Red Tape*, August, pp. 1–2.

who remained employed at the GPS in a variety of administrative and management tasks – faced the prospect of 'dealing with all the stuff'.

Alan Leishman, who by 1989 was working in senior management at the Gov, expressed concern about the wastage and loss of materials that took place after the closure.

> It was <pause> rather criminal … Nobody had any clear guidelines as to how we were to do it – we were just told: 'Clean up the place' … It was done in such a way that everything just sorta floated out … I do have to say that the only thing that I *really* did at the Printing Office during the wind-up: I got all the historic things to somewhere that was mindable. Because there was no plan whatsoever, and that was the criminal part about it.[24]

Alan went on to bemoan the lack of planning:

> The sheer amount of wastage. There was no planned closing, as far as I ever saw. Yes, they sold off all the materials, that sort of thing, what they could, but a lot of it had got to the stage, you know you'd have something that had been printed, needed to be bound. There was no way of doing anything with it! That was the end of it … But, silly part of it, they hadn't contacted major users, like Parliament House, or anything like that.[25]

In those final four weeks, Alan ensured that historic materials (i.e. nineteenth and early twentieth century items) ended up in the hands of the State Library of NSW, NSW State Records and the Powerhouse Museum (among other institutions). Government departments that were awaiting their orders simply lost much the material that was in-process as at June 1989.

Former compositor Tim Guy accessed the building after the closure. Employed by the GPS, he was responsible for removing some of the Gov's computer wiring from the building. He recalled:

> It was a shockin' ghost town. Yeah. I was going through an area …

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[24] Alan Leishman, interview with author, 28 October 2011.

[25] ibid.

> it might've held 80, 90 fellas, and you knew every one of them and it was just a ghost town, no one there. It was really eerie, really strange.[26]

Like Tim, Terry Hagenhofer was also employed in the GPS. For a short period following the closure, this small agency operated out of a space in the ground floor of the Gov building and Terry also remembered walking through the empty factory:

> I went in after, when it closed … And it had leaked, because it had been a while. A lot of the parquetry had swelled, and you looked in and all the floors were buckled, because it had got all wet. And it was a real mess … I'd go up, that was just eerie, it was just, everything gone … Oh yeah, it was sorta sad.[27]

The transition to private printing arrangements was not a smooth one. By November of 1989, there were shortages of transport tickets and school exercise books, and the printing and distribution of the *NSW Government Gazette* and *Hansard* had been delayed for much longer periods than it had under the Gov.[28] Up-to-date Bills and Acts were becoming difficult to find and legal firms, judges, librarians and parliamentarians were increasingly frustrated by the constant shortages, delays and general confusion over responsibilities for the printing and distribution of standard government material.[29] Reports tabled in Parliament were not accessible to MPs. Parliamentary papers were no longer printed with presses; instead they were reproduced on a small number of photocopiers run by Parliamentary administrative staff. Low-paid administrative officers in the Legislative Assembly were said to be spending long hours reproducing parliamentary documents on basic photocopying equipment.[30]

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[26] Tim Guy, interview with author, 24 July 2013.

[27] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011.

[28] Letter from General Secretary Allan Gibson, Public Service Association (1989) to Premier Nick Greiner, 25 October. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2112, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

[29] Memo from G.J. Costelloe (1989), 'Debate following suspension of standing orders', to G. Messiter, Secretary of the Department of Administrative Services, 22 November. Held at Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

[30] P. Clark (1989), 'Parliamentary staff lose sleep over extra printing work', *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 29, p. 5; P. Whelan (1989), *Hansard*, NSW Legislative Assembly, 7 December, p. 14664.

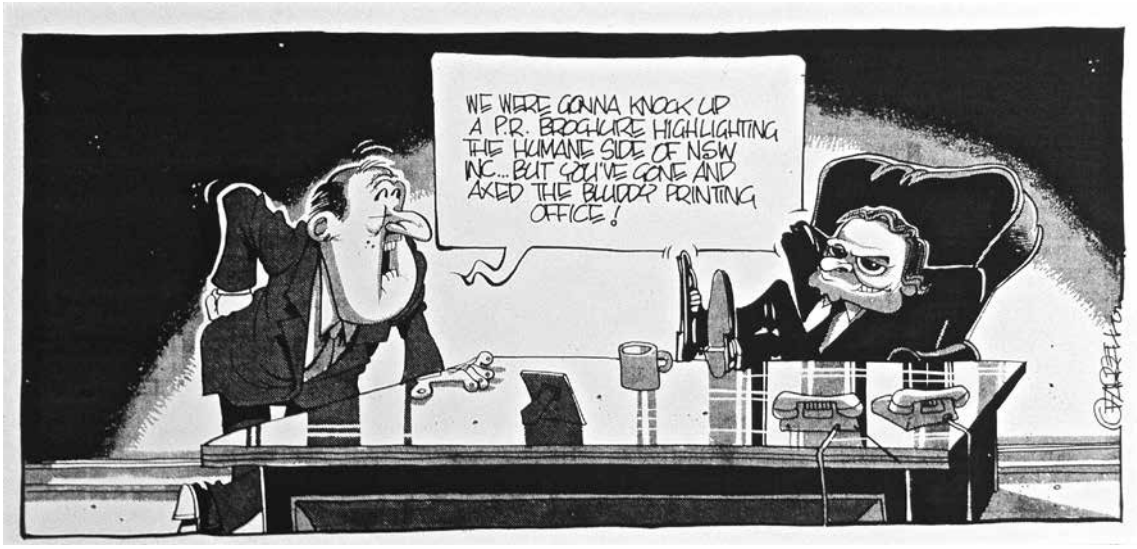

Fig. 118 **Cartoon by Vince O'Farrell, 1989**, most likely published in the *Illawarra Mercury*. (Source unknown, unmarked clipping given to me by a worker.)

Michael Rubacki, a former Gov employee who was working at the Parliamentary Counsel's Office in 1989, remembered the challenge of producing the first few issues of the *NSW Government Gazette* after the Gov had closed. If one thought that the Gov sounded anachronistic and peculiar, what followed was even more ad hoc:

> The Government didn't really think this through, what the technology would be … What we did was we bought two high-speed photocopiers. So the whole thing changed. So instead of being a commercial printing production where every document is a printed original, because they'd just developed high-speed lasers, really high speed, 150 a minute or something like that … It was seat-of-the-pants stuff. There was another event that was even more primitive, and that was the production of the *Government Gazette*. Because the *Government Gazette* is quite a complicated constellation of documents, and it is fairly critical for the government in terms of timing … I had to arrange it in the office. And we actually did it with scissors and paste and glue … *The Gazette* was a bit rough and ready, and it was just printed sort of on the sly somewhere, I dunno who did it, I just delivered at 3 [o'clock] in the morning to a suburban address, and

> the woman who was organising it came out in her brunch coat and slippers, and I said,
> 'Here it is!' It was all very exciting at the time.[31]

On 22 November 1989, the aforementioned Member for Fairfield, Geoff Irwin, made the most of the disorganisation of the government's printing matters when he addressed the Legislative Assembly:

> This is the degree to which standards have degenerated. The laws of this State are being printed out on a photocopier … We have not only ticket offices without tickets and schools without books and stationery, but also a Parliament without Acts, and committees and departments without reports as well as a Legislature without written legislation.[32]

We must remember that in 1989, data had not been digitised to the extent that it was accessible electronically. The sudden loss of the Gov was temporarily disabling for a state that required tangible printed mater to maintain the efficient and functional state entity. Almost three decades on, such concerns about the provision of printed paper seem petty, but at the time the lack of access to printed material essentially meant a lack of access to information. Irwin's statement also infers that the *quality* of the printing is important; upholding the authority of a state might require something more convincing than a pile of 'blotchy' photocopied pages.

The auctions

Deposed as the head of a now-redundant department, former Government Printer Don West remained employed by the NSW Government for several months after the closure. He was given an office in Sydney city and had very little to do. In our interview Don recalled:

> I joined … [Gordon] Messiter's staff at his office up in Macquarie Street,

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[31] Michael Rubacki, interview with author, 17 May 2012.

[32] G. Irwin (1989), Debate following the Suspension of Standing Orders, *Hansard*, NSW Legislative Assembly, 22 November, p. 13151.

> and they gave me a nice office up there and a secretary, and everything I wanted and nothing to do! <laughs> I sat there for about a week and thought, 'this is bloody stupid', you know.[33]

Don offered to organise the final clear-out of the building. Following the exodus of the workers at the end of July 1989, the factory remained, still filled with furnishings, machinery, paper, materials and office detritus. In mid-August 1989 he put out tenders for valuation and an on-site auction and he engaged Mason Gray Strange NSW Ltd. to undertake a series of auctions to sell the remaining material and equipment in the building.[34]

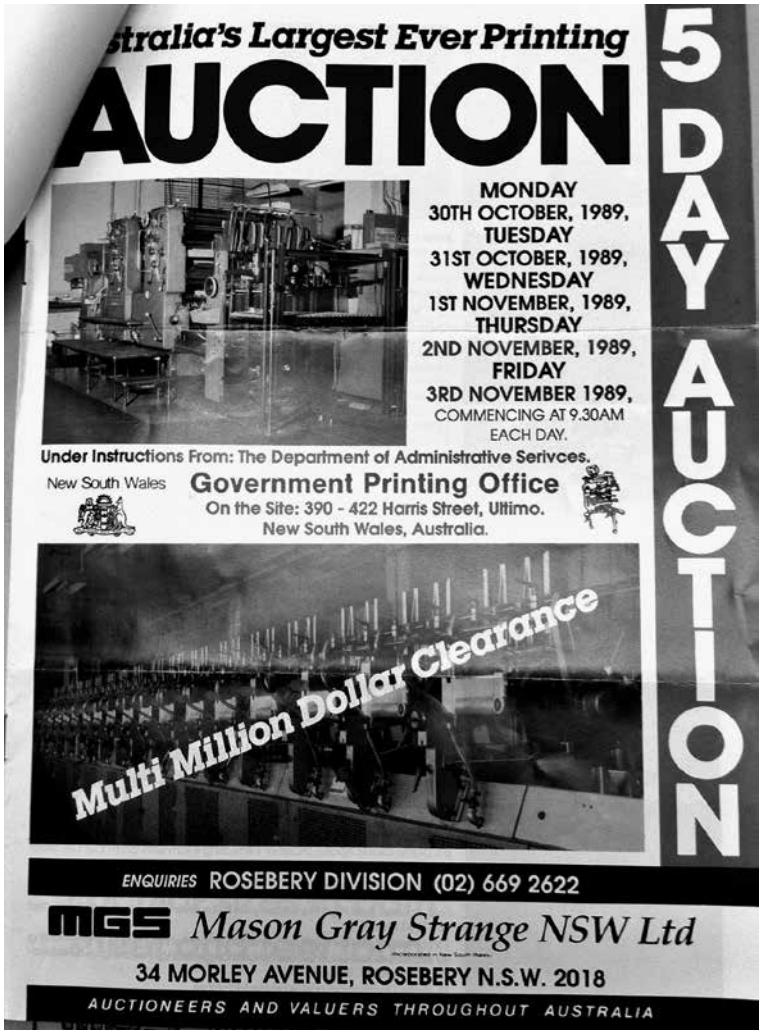

Fig. 119 **Advertisement pamphlet for the five-day Government Printing Office auction, 1989**, held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

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[33] Don West, interview with author, 12 September 2012.

[34] 'Disposal of Government Printing Office plant and equipment' (1989), *Sydney Morning Herald* (advertisement), 14 August, p. 28.

The auctions took place on site in Ultimo from 30 October – 3 November 1989 and on 19 June 1990.[35] [Fig. 119] By the end of November 1989, the government had reportedly raised $7 million from the sale of Gov materials.[36] Items on sale included a wide-ranging selection of printing office miscellany, for example, large-format presses, computer equipment, telephones, chairs, work-boots and a wheelchair. Some of the objects up for sale retained significance for the workers. As quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, gold-finisher John Neale, who had worked at the Gov for 25 years, explained that he would be 'sad to lose the cabinet of hand-held brass embossing tools he had used to decorate the covers of special books over the past 17 years'.[37] John also wrote a handwritten letter to the auctioneers asking to purchase the Westinghouse refrigerator located in the binding room.[38]

Terry Hagenhofer went back to the Gov during the auction and saw that *his* camera had been sold:

> When they had the auction, about 1990, I just had to go in. That was my final sort of thing. <pause> Just have a squiz. I wasn't buying anything, but they were auctioning all sorts of machinery. A lot of it was already [sold]. My camera was already <pause> 'my camera' <laughs> as I was saying. You were saying that before with ownership of things. Oh yeah.[39]

Geoff Hawes was also disgruntled about the auction:

> And then when it did close in '89, they just sold everything! I went there one day and everything had an auction number. Everything. Anything that was sitting there had an auction sticker. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it.[40]

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[35] 'Australia's largest ever printing auction' (1989), advertisement; 'Auction sale' (1990), advertisement, both held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

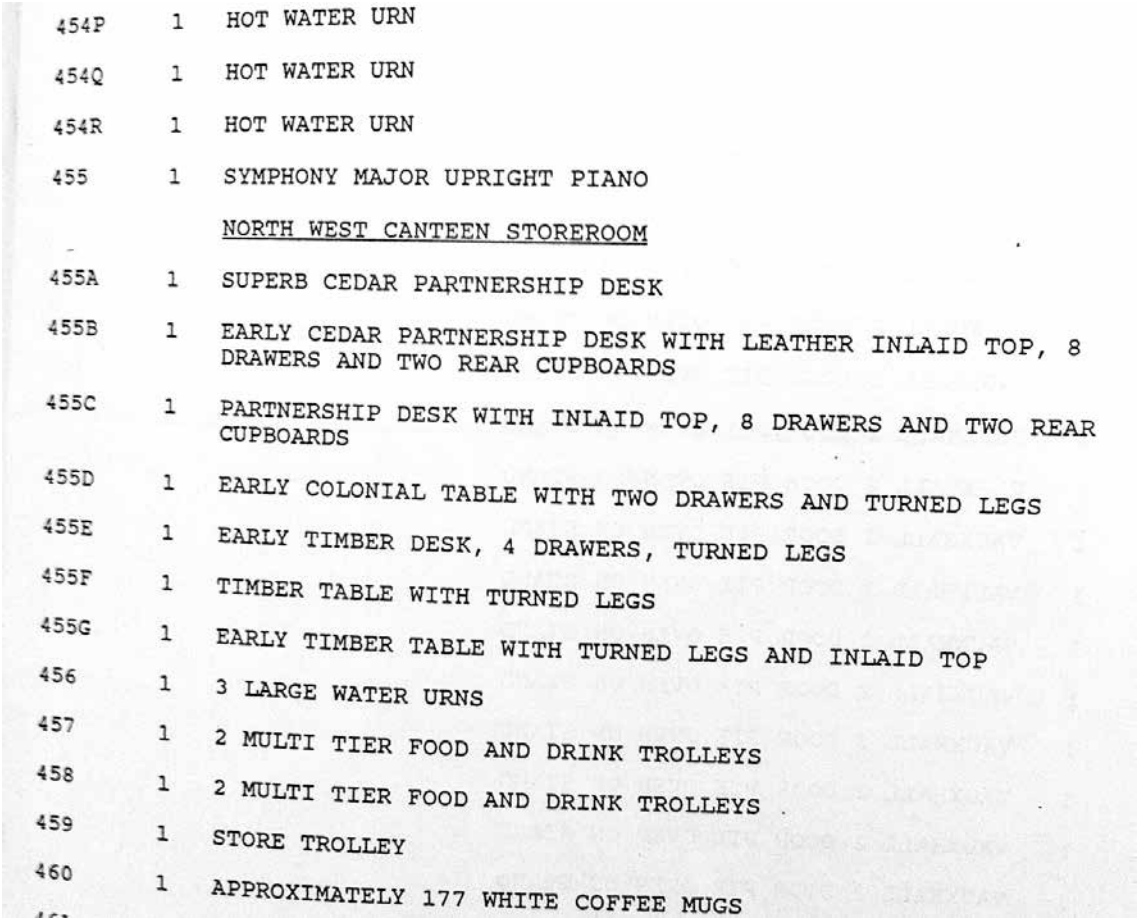
[36] R. Webster, *Hansard* (1989) NSW Legislative Assembly, 22 November, p. 13155.

[37] C. Johnston (1989), 'Pressing clearance sale', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October, p. 3.

[38] J. Neale (1989), Letter to auctioneers, 4 August, NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2112, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

[39] Terry Hagenhofer, interview with author, 5 December 2011.

[40] Geoff Hawes, interview with author, 16 February 2012.



454P	1	HOT WATER URN
454Q	1	HOT WATER URN
454R	1	HOT WATER URN
455	1	SYMPHONY MAJOR UPRIGHT PIANO
		NORTH WEST CANTEEN STOREROOM
455A	1	SUPERB CEDAR PARTNERSHIP DESK
455B	1	EARLY CEDAR PARTNERSHIP DESK WITH LEATHER INLAID TOP, 8 DRAWERS AND TWO REAR CUPBOARDS
455C	1	PARTNERSHIP DESK WITH INLAID TOP, 8 DRAWERS AND TWO REAR CUPBOARDS
455D	1	EARLY COLONIAL TABLE WITH TWO DRAWERS AND TURNED LEGS
455E	1	EARLY TIMBER DESK, 4 DRAWERS, TURNED LEGS
455F	1	TIMBER TABLE WITH TURNED LEGS
455G	1	EARLY TIMBER TABLE WITH TURNED LEGS AND INLAID TOP
456	1	3 LARGE WATER URNS
457	1	2 MULTI TIER FOOD AND DRINK TROLLEYS
458	1	2 MULTI TIER FOOD AND DRINK TROLLEYS
459	1	STORE TROLLEY
460	1	APPROXIMATELY 177 WHITE COFFEE MUGS

Fig. 120 **Sample from the auction lot listings for the NSW Government Printing Office auction, 1989**. Held at NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

Every single item listed in these two auctions is recorded on a printed register, which is now held at NSW State Records.[41] For scholars of material culture and design, the Gov's auction lot listings are a potentially rich source of information about the designed world. The lot listings include such large and expensive items as trucks and the Bielomatik machine, listed in exactly the same manner as the Post-it notes, pencils and Wite-Out. The registers provide evidence that the Gov still had letterpress machinery on site in 1989. Punters could bid for a Ludlow machine or a Monotype keyboard; they could also buy a cheap setting stick or a compositors' trimming saw. The documents even list a Symphony Major upright piano, itemised alongside several hot-water urns. [Fig. 120]

[41] NSW Government Printing Office General Correspondence Files, #18/2115, NSW State Records, Kingswood.

Labour historians Charles Fahey, John Lack and Liza Dale-Hallett have explored the challenge of piecing together palpable industrial histories when actual factory locations are no longer accessible. In the absence of architectural and physical remnants, what is left to work with? In the case of the Sunshine Harvester Works, Fahey, Lack and Dale-Hallett used photographs, film, archives and oral histories to give life to the institution's heritage, notwithstanding the destruction of the Harvester Works themselves.[42] In the case of the NSW Government Printing Office, the auction lot listings provide a strikingly thorough capturing of the material contents of the building. The auction lot lists provide an uncanny encapsulation of a printing house at a particular historical moment, in all its tangible detail, but without its workers. It is rendered there on paper as a list, frozen in time, everything up for sale.

Final reflections

Although the physicality of these remnant objects has been removed – they now exist only as a printed list – the recorded presence of these things tells us something about the interconnectedness of people, objects, machinery and spaces. The decommissioning of the Gov involved a separating out of people from the things that they used at work and from the space in which they laboured. Every*thing* and every*one* was redistributed, rearranged and redefined. Thus we return to the central message of this dissertation: history is not merely the movement of people through time, it is bound up with the ever-changing physical and spatial world. A bringing-together of labour history and material culture studies, therefore, seems not only appropriate but in some cases, entirely necessary.

Precarious Printers has pulled together what it can from material and social vestiges: workers' memories, photographs, objects, films and archives. In the research process, the source material that I uncovered was rich with detail, stories, jokes, technical information and controversies. Space prevents me from including every marvellous anecdote told in oral history interviews.

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[42] C. Fahey, J. Lack & L. Dale-Hallett (2003), 'Resurrecting the Sunshine Harvester Works: Re-presenting and reinterpreting the experience of industrial work in twentieth century Australia', *Labour History*, vol. 85, November, pp. 9–28.

The archival materials are also full of possibilities for future research (and because the boxes are in an unlisted state at NSW State Records, I was not able to explore them with as much precision as I would have liked).

Labour historians may object that the industrial controversies pertaining to this workplace have not been given as much detail as labour history normally provides. That is true; but this is not an industrial relations analysis of the Gov. I have focused instead on some of the everyday challenges and experiences for workers: technological change, shifting gender relations, worker-machine relations and a mounting sense of industrial decline, accompanied by the loss of the collective and the rise of the individual. A focus on working life has enabled us to learn of the unofficial creative pursuits and lively workplace culture that took shape in this demanding period.

In this dissertation we have seen how, in the increasingly insecure economic climate of the late 1970s and 1980s, workers attempted to take responsibility for their own survival, no longer trusting their employers or their union to 'have their back'. For these employees, the demand for their knowledge of printing technology – which had originally been so fundamental to their identity and job security – dissolved before them. This left some people in a bewildered state, with an indeterminate and unfixed professional identity and few certainties upon which to rely. *Precarious Printers* has demonstrated the significant role that material culture, technology and spatial relations play in a very human story about adaptation, strategic survival and the ultimate decline of a nineteenth century-style industrial establishment in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Gov belonged to an economic system based on tariff protections and a strong manufacturing sector. It was part of a world where governance and authority were confirmed only through tangible, paper-based printed matter. A government job was a 'job for life' and law was not law until it was printed by the Gov.[43] These certainties were to dissolve in the late 1980s and 1990s. The prevailing social order underwent a dramatic shift away from a framework characterised by certainty, clear delineation, implicit hierarchy and tangible symbols of authority and modern

[43] 'Paper tigers' (1989), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June, p. 26.

governance. In its place emerged a social and economic order with fewer apparent rules, where information experienced an epistemological shift from paper into ephemeral data, where long-established craft skills had little value, where union membership held less influence and where loyalty to an organisation became meaningless. Information was just beginning to disappear into intangible yet all-encompassing digital realms and data flows. The once-entrenched high-status printing trades (such as compositor, bookbinder, press-machinist, camera operator, stereotyper and so forth) were in the process of disintegrating, to be replaced by multi-skilled but vaguely expressed jobs such as 'systems analyst', 'coder', 'administrator' and 'data-entry operator'.

Between 1959 and 1989 this transformation in social and labour structures constituted a re-ordering of people *and* things on the once-staunchly demarcated space of the shop floor. Flexibility was the new mantra. Workers had to adapt and retrain or find themselves out of work. Machinery and spaces took on new associations and different types of workers became allied to them. And, as we have seen in Chapter Nine, in the final years at the Gov, unofficial creative workplace practices took on a more political and resistant tone, as workers formed their own explanations and narratives about what was happening around them.

As outlined in this dissertation, the story of the Gov is part of a bigger picture relating to the de-industrialisation of Australia. The Gov reflects the structural and cultural changes that Sydney underwent over the twentieth century. In the first half of the century, manufacturing was the source of most employment in the city and by the mid-twentieth century jobs were plentiful and skilled labourers were in demand. The work could be difficult, dangerous and repetitive, but with overtime and piecework, labourers could bring home relatively high wages. In the mid-twentieth century union representation was strong and management worked closely with unions before making any major changes to the labour process, wages or conditions. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the manufacturing industries declined and unions were weakened by tougher labour laws and fewer members, those old certainties of the past crumbled.[44]

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[44] C. Fahey, J. Lack, & L. Dale-Hallett, op. cit., p. 26.

Today, Ultimo is an inner-city Sydney suburb characterised by global connectedness, media and technology firms, architectural and tourist attractions and a number of educational institutions. It is variously described as a multimedia 'hub' or a networked node. Ultimo epitomises Sydney's shift from a manufacturing economy to a 'global service city'. As noted in Chapter Three, the Gov's old building in Harris Street proved too solid and expensive to demolish. Instead, it was extensively refurbished and it now houses a computer data centre. Now, government information – once solid and tangible, in the hands of publicly employed compositors and printers – is now in a data 'cloud' maintained by a multi-national corporation. Government information is no longer paper or metal, nor is it in the public hands of a trained craftsperson. Instead, government information – data about citizens – exists in encrypted bits and bytes. It is ungraspable, invisible and in private ownership.

Appendix I:

Oral History Project Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

THE NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 1959–1989

My name is Jesse Adams Stein and I am a PhD student at the University of Technology, Sydney. I am conducting research into the NSW Government Printing Office, Ultimo, 1959–1989, and I welcome your assistance.

The research will involve one (or possibly more than one) audio interview/s with me, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed and may be used as quotable material for my PhD thesis, which I intend to complete in 2014. Interviews will take a maximum of two hours of your time, and can be much shorter, depending on your needs.

As a participant, you can be provided with an interview transcript and/or a digital mp3 file of the interview, if desired, and you will be informed of the completion of my thesis, and given an electronic copy, if desired. The digital sound files will be stored on a hard drive in a secure location. The typed transcripts will be temporarily stored online with the software program Dedoose, and managed only by Jesse. Dedoose is a high-security encrypted program for handling qualitative data.

You are under no obligation to participate in this research. Please be advised that if you wish to participate, **your identity can remain confidential** in transcripts and further written records, if desired. (See the consent form for the confidentiality option.) Please be advised you can withdraw from the research at any time and without explanation. Should that occur I will thank you for your time so far and will not contact you about this research again.

This study has been approved by the UTS Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you can contact the Ethics Committee (Tel: XXXX XXXX, xxxxx@uts.edu.au) and quote the no. **HREC 2011-285-A**. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

I am very grateful for your time and help with this research.

With sincere thanks

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Appendix II:

Oral History Release

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Jesse Adams Stein
Project: NSW Government Printing Office, 1959–1989
School: School of Design
Faculty: Design Architecture & Building, UTS
Address: Room XXX, Peter Johnson Building UTS,
702–730 Harris St, Ultimo NSW 2007
Telephone: XX XXXX XXXX
Email: xxxxx@uts.edu.au

This research has been approved by UTS, under reference no. HREC 2011-285-A

I, _____, consent to participate in this research project.

I understand my participation involves one or more interviews, which will be recorded on a digital sound recorder, transcribed, and may be used as quotable material for Jesse Adams Stein's PhD thesis on the NSW Government Printing Office, which she intends to complete in 2014.

I am aware that I can contact Jesse, or her supervisor, Professor Peter McNeil (Tel XXXXXXX), if I have any concerns. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without consequences, and without giving a reason. I have read the information sheet providing more information about this project.

I understand that my identity can remain confidential in transcripts and further written records, if desired.

I have indicated my wishes in the confidentiality option below: (please tick one)

☐ My name should be withheld from the public record
☐ I consent to my full name being included in this researcher's findings

_____ ____/____/____
Signature (participant)

Notes:
_____
_____
_____

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Glossary of terms & abbreviations

Autologic MTU machines	Large-scale computer equipment used as part of the Penta typesetting system.
bookbinder	A tradesperson fully indentured into the trade of bookbinding.
bromides	Photosensitive paper used in cold composition to make bromide prints.
buckram	A coarse fabric used in bookbinding, replaced the widespread use of leather for legal bound volumes.
caster	See Monotype caster.
chapel	A branch of a trade union or craft guild.
chase	A heavy metal frame upon which metal type and blocks were placed, held together and ready for the letterpress process.
cold composition	The setting of type with the aid of computers and phototypesetting, not with the use of hot metal.
cold type	See cold composition.
Comp-Edit	An early program for phototypesetting (cold composition) using word processors and union labour at the NSW Government Printing Office, used from 1980.
comp/comps	Slang word for compositor/s.
composing stick	A tool used by compositors to set lines of text from individual metal letters.
compositor	A person who set the type prior to printing, in hot metal or by keyboarding.
computer phototypesetting	Electronic typesetting using a computer program.
die-stamping	The stamping of decorations, images or logos in relief, on paper or card.
diss	The post-printing process of removing type from set pages and formes and replacing it into their typecases.
dry-offset	A printing method that used photosetting principles to produce a printing plate with a raised surface, meaning that letterpress principles and work practices remained, but the printing could take place on a lithographic machine.
dustcoat	Minimal protective clothing, particularly worn in the photographic and lithographic sections of the Government Printing Office in the 1960s and 1970s.

EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity, a principle employed in the NSW Public Service since the passing of the *1977 Anti-Discrimination Act*.
electrotyping	The process of producing a printing plate made from a mould and coated with nickel or copper.
em	A unit of width measurement in typography, relative to point size. An em is roughly equivalent to one typeset character (originally based on the letter M).
en	A unit of width measurement in typography, approximately half an em (originally based on the letter N).
embossing	A labour-intensive process that enables a printed surface to stand out in relief, often used in traditional government stationery for significant government officials and the legal establishment.
etaoin-shrdlu	The top line of letters of a Linotype keyboard. The made-up words were used to signify the Linotype keyboard layout.
flatbed press	A letterpress printing machine where the printing plate lies flat on the bed and the impression cylinder and paper are rolled over it.
flong	A papier-mâché sheet used for casting moulds for stereo plates.
FoC	Father of the Chapel. The full-time union official who represented the printers' union branch or chapel.
font room	The room in which supplies of loose type (made by Monotype machines) was maintained and used by hand compositors to refill their typecases.
foreign orders	Colloquial (NSW) term for an object that is produced by an employee in the workplace – made from workplace materials and/or scrap, using in-house machinery – produced in an unauthorised manner.
foreigners	Term used in Queensland & Western Australia for foreign orders.
foreignies	Term used in South Australia for foreign orders.
forme	A complete set of metal type, assembled in a chase for letterpress printing.
frame	See chase.
furniture	Small pieces of wood wedged around the edge of a metal forme to keep the pages of type tight. Also used for blank spaces on a page.
galley	A long metal tray holding text in metal type. Also used to mean 'galley proof' – see entry below.
galley proof	A proof in the form of a long piece of text, usually not divided into pages but printed on a long, continuous sheet of paper.
galley trucks	A trolley with wheels used to transport galleys around the Government Printing Office building.

Gov, the	Colloquial term for the NSW Government Printing Office. Also spelled 'The Guv'.
Government Gazette, the	The *New South Wales Government Gazette* is the official channel for the circulation of Proclamations, Regulations, Government notices, private legal advertisements and other matters under the statues of the NSW Government. It was printed by the NSW Government Printing Office until mid-1989.
Graphic Reproduction	A section within the Government Printing Office that encompassed photographic reproduction, etching, engraving, camera operation and other forms of graphic rendering.
half-calf	Also known as 'half-leather', a form of bookbinding where the corners and spine of the book were in very soft leather, and the rest of the binding was made of cloth.
hand-binding	Bookbinding undertaken chiefly by hand, using hand tools, not mass-production machinery.
hand-compositor	A compositor who worked in imposition, headers, layout, etc. in a composing room, assembling pieces of metal type, rather than using a hot-metal typesetting machine.
Hansard	The official record of Parliamentary debates and proceedings.
Heidelberg cylinder	A cylinder letterpress machine manufactured by Heidelberg.
Heidelberg Speedmaster	A model of Heidelberg lithographic press from the 1970s that could be modified to handle letterpress, through a process known as dry offset.
homers	The term used in the United States for foreign orders.
hot-metal typesetting	A method of composition of type that involved casting molten metal into type forms and assembling it into pages and formes.
imposition	The act of arranging pages of type, or films, so that when a large sheet was printed, each page wase in the right order and the correct way up for cutting and folding. With metal type this took place on a large, flat imposing stone or 'slab'. Once the pages were in the correct order they were locked into a chase for printing on a letterpress.
imposition slab	The large flat table or stone surface used for imposition (see Imposition).
la perruque	The French term, popularised by Michel de Certeau, for Foreign orders.
leading hand	A senior tradesperson.
letterpress	The process by which a raised surface of metal or wooden type was covered in ink and paper pressed onto it with a press to produce the printed image.

Linotype machine	The most widely-known type of hot-metal typesetting machine. It was a linecasting machine used for producing single lines of type that were then assembled by compositors to make a page. It came into widespread use in the late nineteenth century in newspaper printeries.
Linotype operator	Tradesperson who operated a Linotype machine. This job was seen as a high-status role in the printing industry.
lithographic dot-etching	The etching of an image through lithographic principles of oil and water to produce an image on a plate, which was then transferred to paper. This method dealt in making halftones darker or lighter, using hand etching to reduce or increase the size of the dots.
litho	Slang for lithography.
lithography	A method of printing in which ink adheres to greasy areas of heated metal, stone or film and then is transferred to paper. Invented in 1798 by Alois Senefelder using a stone plate, lithography was updated in the second half of the twentieth century for high-speed lithographic presses, using the same principle but with a metal plate. See also Offset-lithography.
Ludlow machine	A hot-metal composing machine used to make type in large point sizes, for tasks such as headings, invitations and titles.
machine-feeders	The employees who fed paper into presses before machine-feeding presses were available. This role was usually given to low-paid women workers.
makeready	The act of getting a print machine ready for printing. It involved getting the plates set up and testing the alignment, the paper, the ink levels and the quality of the impression.
Masonic Lodge	An organisational unit of Freemasonry.
Masons	Freemasons – a fraternity with traditions tracing back to the stonemasons' guilds in the sixteenth century.
matrix/matrices	Base letterforms inside a Linotype machine, used to cast the moulds for the type.
Microbee	A microcomputer unit available in Australia in the 1980s, used by compositors at the Government Printing Office for training in qwerty keyboard operation.
Monotype casting machine	A large casting machine that processed punched paper Monotype tape, in order to produce individual metal letters of type.
Monotype caster	An indentured tradesperson who operated a Monotype casting machine.

Monotype machine	A typesetting machine used to produce individual letters (rather than lines) of type. With a Monotype machine, the compositor typed on a keyboard, producing punched paper tape, which was then fed into a casting machine to generate individual letters. Monotype was popular at the Government Printing Office because it was so useful in typesetting tabular matter.
Monotype operator	An indentured tradesperson who operated a Monotype keyboard. This was seen as a high status trade in the printing industry.
NSW	New South Wales
offset-lithography	The same principle of printing as lithography, except the image on the plate is transferred to an offset cylinder, and from there it is printed onto paper.
offsider	The assistant to a printing tradesperson.
overseer	The supervisor of a particular industrial section in a factory.
paper-ruler	The indentured tradesperson responsible for tasks involving the ruling of fine lines on paper, usually using machines known as paper-ruling machines.
Penta typesetting system	The computerised typesetting system in use at the NSW Government Printing Office from 1984 to 1989.
perquisites	Non-monetary benefits or privileges provided to workers. The taking of material in-kind perquisites was customary practice in feudal England and the rise of industrial capitalism and centralised legalistic order criminalised long-established customary practices, often redefining them as theft.
photo-engraving	The process of preparing image-based letterpress plates for printing, usually from photographs or illustrations.
photo-polymer plates	A printing plate that has a layer of photosensitive plastic material bonded to a flexible metal (often aluminium) plate.
phototypesetting	A method of typesetting that produces characters using a computer and exposing light-sensitive film in front of a mask. This method superseded hot-metal typesetting.
piecework	Labour that is paid at a set rate per unit produced. Linotype piecework operators were paid for the number of corrected ens they produced.
press-machinist	The indentured tradesperson who operates press machinery.
reader's assistant	The assistant who read the original copy aloud to the proofreader, who checked the galley proof and marked up corrections.
qwerty	The standard keyboard layout in English-speaking countries.
setting stick	See composing stick.
slab	See imposition slab.
slug	A line of type, typically produced by a Linotype machine.

standing matter	Galleys of type that were retained (not dissed) to be amended and reprinted at a later date. At the Government Printing Office these included materials such as transport timetable, official forms and the electoral roll. Also known as 'standing formes'.
stereotyping	A type of printing plate developed in the late eighteenth century and used in letterpress runs. It involved making a mould or mat of papier-mâché, and the dried mat was used to cast a stereotype from hot metal.
tablehand	Low-paid general assistant in printing, composing and bookbinding, who undertook repetitive tasks not assigned to indentured tradespeople. At the Government Printing Office, tablehands were often women and/or migrants.
timehand	This term was used to delineate between a pieceworker and a normal employee. Timehands were paid for the hours that they worked, not the amount they produced.
tradesperson	An employee who has completed a full apprenticeship and is employed in his or her trade.
typecases	The wooden containers that held individual metal pieces of type, organised alphabetically.
type stick	See composing stick.
Unix	A computer operating system developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Notes